

WEEK 9

CHAPTER 8

The Space of Africville

Creating, Regulating,
and Remembering
the Urban "Slum"

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There is a little frequented part of the City, overlooking Bedford Basin, which presents an unusual problem for any community to face. In what may be described as an encampment, or shack town, there live some seventy negro families. . . .

The citizens of Africville live a life apart. On a sunny, summer day, the small children roam at will in a spacious area and swim in what amounts to their private lagoon. In winter, life is far from idyllic. In terms of the physical condition of buildings and sanitation, the story is deplorable. Shallow wells and cesspools, in close proximity, are scattered about the slopes between the shacks.

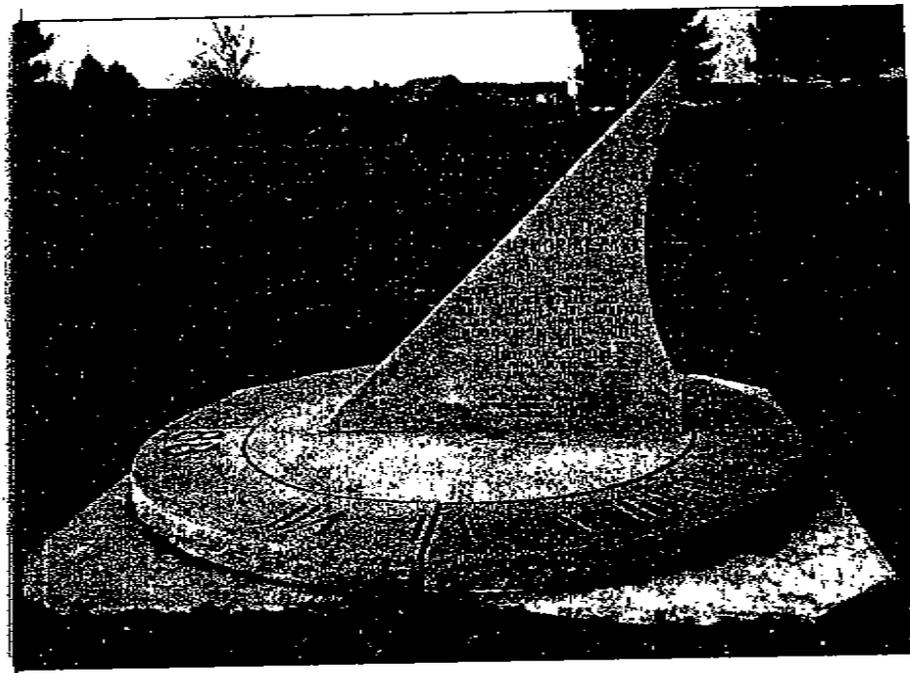
There are no accurate records of conditions in Africville. There are only two things to be said. The families will have to be rehoused in the near future. The land which they now occupy will be required for the further development of the City.¹

This chapter

traces a series of events that

demonstrate how the space of Africville, Nova Scotia, was legally regulated by the City of Halifax throughout its existence. This space remains a contested site—a reminder to the city that burial of past injustice requires diligent maintenance. Through exploration of several events over time, it becomes clearer that the notion of a united black community, which exists on its own terms and is subject to the same rights and freedoms as the greater white community, was and remains inconceivable. The dislocation of Africville residents from their land and community was more than an isolated, finite project; on the contrary, the process has been one of ongoing eviction, suppression, and denial.

The role of a spatial analysis becomes clear in three ways throughout the discussion. First, the legal regulation of space governs what can and cannot happen within it, in ways that may not be obviously defined as racist in law itself, nor perhaps to a community not directly and negatively affected by such regulation. Second, the regulation and limitation of spaces of resistance are easily masked as a necessary measure to protect the public, a reasonable and equitable measure that applies equally to all



*The Monument to Africville Settlers,
Seaview Memorial Park, Halifax, 2001
(TONY COLALACOVJ)*

citizens, rather than targeting any specific group. Third, the violence inherent in the regulation of racialized space is rendered invisible when law is conceived as being a product of consensus of liberal social values. The inequities can only be heard when the differing stories of those involved are allowed to emerge. Thus, this chapter makes an argument for context-specific considerations of wrong-doing that go beyond an assumed consensus of “fairness” to a series of legal actions that were planned and carried out by one group against another.

While there are many elements to the Africville story that tell a tale of spatial and racial discrimination, for the purposes of length and poignancy, I have selected a few key moments from a broader and ongoing struggle to demonstrate the inconceivability to a racist society of an enduring communal Black presence.

As a white writer, I believe it is important to make clear my choices in directing the study's conceptual bent towards whiteness-as-dominance, rather than attempting to replicate "the black experience" of Africville, a story which is not mine to tell. While not intended to alienate or exclude, I acknowledge that this form of analysis and the conclusions I make embody a critique directed to the white community, which people of colour may not find to be "new" or illuminating. Further, I do not mean to suggest at any stage of analysis that resistance and opposition were absent among Africville residents themselves. Certainly, organization against the city's plans took place at the time of Africville's forced dislocation, and various events and projects that seek justice, encourage remembrance, and celebrate resistance have been underway ever since. I am merely choosing here to focus on the dominant players whose governance made resistance insufficient to save Africville. It is the practices of the dominant group that we must critically examine if we seek to educate for change among a white community that is accountable for things done to Black communities.

A Story of Un/settlement

... consideration of this or any other urban development must recognize the significance of its prior occupancy and revisit the colonial past to retell some of the histories of initial dispossession of the land involved. . . . The issue is not only one of initial invasion, but of ongoing dislocation and exclusion.²

To "begin at the beginning" draws one into a complex history of Black settlement in Nova Scotia in the eighteenth century, a history too detailed to fully discuss here. Briefly, the means by which Black residents of the province came to form the community of Africville must be regarded in the context of a history of the displacement and enslavement of Black people by whites in North America, of hostile reception upon settlement in Nova Scotia, complete with a worldview that demanded their containment and denial, and of a young nation struggling to form its identity through the predominantly British colonial enterprise.

Although slavery was never legally instituted in Nova Scotia, some whites held slaves at the time the City of Halifax was founded in 1749 and throughout the next fifty years. The practice failed to reach the proportions of American plantation cultures, due more to a paucity of arable

farmland than to widespread public opposition. The number of slaves following the arrival of slave-holding Loyalists is thought to be around fifteen hundred. While officially frowned upon by the courts at a relatively early date, Nova Scotia's "slave culture" was undermined as the labour of incoming free Black and white Loyalists could be had for little more than the price of keeping slaves.

Soon-to-be Africville residents were among the wave of refugee Blacks who arrived after the War of 1812 and who were allotted space in rural regions, particularly present-day Preston, where rocky, inadequate soil made survival off the land impossible. The Africville site on the shores of Bedford Basin, not far from today's city centre, held the hope of diminished isolation, better employment and living conditions, and other economic opportunities. Having purchased the properties in the 1840s from white merchants, founders William Brown and William Arnold established the boundaries within which Africville would develop. Along with other early families, they established a church congregation and elementary school, a postal office, and a few small stores. Although land conditions for farming were no better than on their former plots, a few head of livestock were kept, the Bedford Basin offered a steady supply of fish, and the new location held the increased chance of obtaining waged labour in the city.³

Throughout the community's approximately 120-year history, Halifax's development, particularly in the industrial and disease- and waste-management sectors, encroached on Africville land. In addition to the construction of railway lines, which required the destruction of several Africville buildings, an oil plant storage facility, a bone mill, and a slaughterhouse were built. Encircling these establishments were a leather tanning plant, a tar factory, another slaughterhouse, and a foundry. Shortly after the settlement of Africville, the city established Rockhead Prison on the overlooking hillside; about twenty years later, the city's infectious diseases hospital was placed on this hill, and the open city dump was located about one-and-a-half miles away. Additional construction of railway lines to different factories dislocated more Africville families. Destruction of many surrounding industries following the Halifax Explosion of 1917 resulted in new facilities being built in their places. For decades, this waterfront region was the target of much discussion regarding expropriation for industrial expansion by the City of Halifax, a plan which became solidified in the 1947 rezoning of the city. In the early 1950s, the city dump was moved directly onto Africville land—350 feet from the westernmost home—and

two years later, the city placed an incinerator only fifty yards beyond its south border.

Throughout Africville's existence, building permits to improve homes were increasingly difficult to obtain from the city government. Requests for water lines and sewers, which would bring sanitation and quality of life closer to the standards for the rest of the city, were refused. Police and fire protection and garbage collection on par with such services received by the rest of Halifax were denied. Living conditions were ironically described by city officials as intolerable and unsanitary—in short, as justification for the inevitable dismantling of the community and eviction of its four hundred residents. Discussion of the dismantling continued, until finally, in the 1960s, the threat became a more serious reality. By the end of the decade, despite avid resistance and organization on the part of Africville residents themselves and in concert with other community groups, Africville was expropriated by the City of Halifax for the purposes of industrial development, as well as for the alleged benefits of “slum clearance” and “relocation” of the residents.⁴

Due to an informal system of handing down properties and housing within families and between in-laws over the years, many residents were unable to prove legal title to their land; thus, they had little recourse when faced with the proposition to sell or be evicted. Due to historical, social, and economic conditions, residents had no formal community leadership that would be seen as legitimate political representation and little access to the legal and bureaucratic bargaining tools of the municipality. Most were forced to accept the city's small compensation, or to settle for low prices offered for homes they had not been permitted to maintain and improve, located in what was defined as “the slum by the garbage dump.”⁵ In a seeming mockery, when moving companies refused to be hired, city garbage trucks, which had never serviced Africville, were sent to carry away the residents' belongings.

The last Africville home was bulldozed in 1970. Most of the former residents had to adjust to living in public housing facilities, struggling to pay rent for the first time in their lives, while those who owned their own homes would suffer financial difficulties in the near future. Separated from friends, family, and their strong sense of community, many Africvilleans were left with the insufficiency of welfare dollars and the meager \$500 compensation they had received—defined as a “moral claim”—from the benevolent city.

□ Stage 1: Inducing Illness

Of particular interest to a critical geographical race analysis is the manner in which the control of space and the control of bodies through control of space become tools for defining a community's physical and metaphorical boundaries, its character, and how individuals or groups will be determined through such understandings and associations. David Goldberg writes,

The slum is by definition filthy, foul smelling, wretched, rancorous, uncultivated, and lacking care. The racial slum is doubly determined, for the metaphorical stigma of a black blotch on the cityscape bears the added connotations of moral degeneracy, natural inferiority, and repulsiveness . . . the slum locates the lower class, the racial slum the *underclass*.⁶

In denying the community of Africville essential services that would facilitate its health and its development within the larger metro area, the city produced the community, in the “outside” public mind, as a place of dirt, odour, disease, and waste. These associations, which came to be manifested as the conflation of Africville with degeneracy, filth and “the slum,” justified the further denial of essential services on the basis of how Africville had come to be known. Working from a basic assumption that the use and characterization of space is socially determined, and that the ideologies surrounding race are socially produced, it is possible to speak of a socio-spatial dialectic wherein “space and the political organization of space express social relationships but also react back upon them.”⁷

In the formation of Africville, and its regulation over time, we see an extension of this dialectic in the relationship between power–dominance and the creation of the slum. Particular race relations in this context produced certain space as a repository for all that the dominant group wanted to contain and distance itself from. In the self-fulfilling prophecy—that is, Africville becoming exactly what it was set up to become in the eyes of the outer white community—the slum legitimates dominance by offering a concrete example of filthy, intolerable conditions, a notion of helplessness and a lack of self-determination that are seen as inherent to its inhabitants. The origins of the conditions in question and the absence of choice for the residents must be conveniently forgotten, and this forgetting is

accomplished most easily when the dominant group can achieve an axiomatic yet unspoken association of blackness with inevitable demise. As Barnor Hesse discusses in terms of "diasporic outside/inside," the internal Other, as opposed to the colonial Other overseas, poses a particular problem in western societies:

... temporal nativization of the "other", outside/inside the West is accompanied by a spatial nativization in which people are compressed into prefabricated landscapes, the ghetto, the shanty town, and undergo a process of "representational essentializing" . . . in which one part or aspect of people's lives comes to epitomize them as a whole. . . .⁸

At the same time that we see that observable concrete realities of poverty and deprivation exist, we see in the creation of the racial slum a set of knowledge-making practices that serve to legitimate all that we must believe about Africville in order to dominate it. As Henri Lefebvre writes:

Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology and politics; it has always been political and strategic. If space has an air of neutrality and indifference with regard to its contents and thus seems to be "purely" formal . . . it is precisely because it has been occupied and used, and has already been the focus of past processes whose traces are not always evident on the landscape. Space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has always been a political process. . . . It is a product literally filled with ideologies.⁹

The ideologies produced in the making of Africville-as-slum involve narratives about raced bodies that are tied to, but must not be conflated with, the spaces they inhabit. Take, for instance, the moving of the dump into Africville: this act was received by Africvilleans in the only way they saw possible—to make use of it, to salvage the things that others threw away, repair or clean them, and go on with life:

... we try to make the dump work for us. . . . There's all kinds of scrap metal in there that you can collect and sell. . . . There's ways of tellin' good stuff from bad. . . . We got fellas here who can get [car] parts off

the dump and make the worst lookin' wreck in the world run like new. . . . You know what really gets up folks' behinds out here? When those newspapers talk about us "scavenging" food and clothes off the dump. People read that stuff and think we're runnin' around diggin' week-old tomatoes and nasty rags out of that messy dump. Any fool knows you get stuff off the trucks *before* they throw it on the dump . . . by the time the ladies out here get through workin' on second-hand clothes with their needle and thread, you'd never know they were bound for the dump. Some folks say the dump was put here to try to drive us out. If that's true, things kind of backfired, didn't they?¹⁰

The dump, although smelly and distasteful, becomes incorporated into social practice as a means of survival. At the same time, from "outside," Africville becomes characterized more strongly than ever as a space of garbage, of the waste of the white community. The use of the dump can be viewed as proof that the Black community is indeed comfortable being associated with dirt, that it is natural for them to live off the waste of others. Spaces are manufactured in ways that dictate what sorts of activities can and will take place in them. Life practice, then, determines both insider and outsider perceptions of identity: from within, perhaps, emerges a sense that the community can survive against unfair odds. Black identity in the outside white public discourse becomes intimately bound up with space/place in a negative sense—they are no longer simply people who live near the dump; they are "scavengers."

To see Others as recipients of your garbage, as *desiring* your waste, constitutes a very particular kind of relation and belief system about their place, their culture, their "peoplehood," on a dramatic level (as well as, very intimately, a belief system about your own place, culture, personhood). Dominant group members are not required to see how these relations are formed; on the contrary, "common-sense" views engender and support a sense that they are natural, that some people simply live "this way."

Many space theorists have described the way in which both marginalized groups and peripheral space signal an existence "beyond" society, apart from civilized norms, and as separate space in which undesirable activities could take place in order to preserve the purity of dominant, ruling space.¹¹ Essentializing the people and the space of Africville becomes apparent in the notion of the community as a site "outside" the rest of society, metaphorically and spatially. As Peter Marcuse makes clear in his

concept of the *residual city*, racial minority spaces frequently come to be seen as functions that house the wastes of society, be they pollutants from industrial manufacturing, sewer systems and garbage disposal areas, or houses for others deemed undesirable, such as AIDS victims or the homeless.¹² This means that undesirable places and practices are located across a boundary that is rarely crossed, or crossed for specific purposes that are “outside” the purity of the white middle-class home—for instance, the ease or exploring the red light district.¹³ Specific to Africville would be the acts of buying liquor illegally¹⁴ or disposing of waste. (Garbage, by definition, is material that is useless, has been thrown out. It must be taken away from where you live, to another place.)

David Sibley’s research on gypsy communities has been influential in pulling together many factors, discourses, and social sanctions that enable the construction of a marginal community as “separate,” inferior, and slumlike. He speaks of the problematic of perceived “disorder,” particularly in travelling communities, whose borders are never clear and require strict regulation.¹⁵ Despite its more than one-hundred-year history and long line of founding families, Africville residents were frequently thought of as a group of transients. In her essay on “the homeless body,” Samira Kawash explores how the absence of place, while socially constituted, is seen as highly problematic and in need of legal and social systems of order-making and containment.¹⁶ Although the Africville population was not seen in quite the same light as the homeless, their image as being outside society, undeserving of “place,” and as threats to the place of the rest of the community, I believe, form some similar conceptions in the dominant public mind. Narratives of disorder become clear as well through references that are made in news reports and in the original relocation study to the community’s criminal element, its potential for disease, and to the possibility that its population was composed mainly of squatters.

Goldberg discusses the making of the slum as periphractic space, characterized by “dislocation, displacement and division” from the rest of society. He concludes that this is “the primary mode by which the space of racial marginality has been articulated and reproduced.”¹⁷ At the same time, he notes that periphractic space is not physically marginal to the urban centre, but, quite the contrary, is usually central, promoting a constant surveillance of its inhabitants and conditions. He refers to Vancouver’s Chinatown and other similarly positioned communities, as functions of “that set of historical categories constituting the idea of the project: dealized racial typifications tied to notions of slumliness, physical and ideological pollution of the body politic, sanitation and health syndromes, lawlessness, addiction, and prostitution.”¹⁸

These notions help to fuel an anachronistic sense of Africville’s Otherness in time and space. Consider, for instance, the quotation at the beginning of this chapter from the provincially commissioned Stephenson Report: Imposing on land coveted for “development of the city” and threatening the city’s borders (even though it was there first), Africville becomes not part of the city. The representation of an “encampment” connotes an axiomatic impermanence, antithetical to progress and development of “society,” which is already understood to be not-Africville. The abrupt solution proposed does not take into account the desires or needs of the residents themselves from their own perspectives. His sweeping disregard for any possibility of the community’s survival is achieved in one brief and conclusive paragraph in a lengthy report that devotes detailed analysis to the upgrading of many other areas of Halifax, some of which are identified as exhibiting “the worst” conditions in the city.¹⁹

The depiction of Africville as “an unusual problem for any community to face,”²⁰ suggests who is considered to be—and not to be—“the community.” One might also question what, exactly, was “unusual” about a peripheral, underprivileged, and neglected Black population in a North American urban centre with a dominant white majority. To see the situation as an isolated case sidesteps a critical interrogation of the systemic causes of racial oppression. In any case, Africville’s “life apart” begs the question, “Apart from what?” The answer can only mean some combination of society-community-nation-progress-time-space-history. Indeed, this view must be fundamental to the description of a place as “little frequented,” although four hundred people were living there.

Interestingly, as the City of Halifax justified its forced dislocation of Africville residents through reference to land use and the need for industrial development, Sibley points out how outsider societies are understood to be contrary to, even the antithesis of, “development.”²¹ The wild and unamed lifestyle connoted in Africville’s “private lagoon” was easily imagined as an outdated freedom, as an intolerable privilege of inhabiting valuable harbourfront space. Space that had to be made white.

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□ Stage 2: Euthanasia

... we knew all about segregation. But we didn't look at ourselves as a segregated community. We just looked at ourselves as a community. And when the people from the Progressive Club and others like them held out integration like some kind of Holy Grail, we told them we weren't sure exactly what integration could do for us as a community.

And the fact that we would raise doubts about it—well, that kind of shocked 'em.²²

To solidify the ideologies produced around the space of Africville, the project of racial desegregation enabled an appearance, to many whites, of good intent that relied on a mode of imposed euthanasia—that is, the necessity of putting the community out of its misery.²³ When suffering is seen as “obvious” and incurable, destruction can be looked on as a form of rescue. Investments in the inevitability of this solution are so strong that it is extremely common for white people to ask, upon hearing of this issue, what Roger Simon might call the obscene question, “Why wouldn't they just leave?”²⁴ This question relies on a learned arrogance that assumes the solution being offered, in this case, to live among white people, is superior, and that the notion of free choice based on a common understanding of the experience exists. The many outsider narratives surrounding the slum construct a background against which implicit and explicit understandings of the (invisibly white) self and community as legitimately dominant are formed. The logic of the slum is productive in its own death, making common-sense knowledge of the fact of its dependence and inevitable need of an outside solution.

What, then, are we to make of the role of law in carrying out the solution in question? Not surprisingly, there was little space for Africville residents to contextualize their claims within a history of poverty, racism, and colonialism inflicted upon them by the same dominant group enacting the current violence. I have struggled with the problematic of identifying the precise legal (illegal?) moves made by the city—in all the accounts I have read the destruction of the community was simply “carried out.” There are no references made to specific legal rulings or principles in the historical accounts, other than the mention of a more recent law passed to prevent certain forms of public protest. Nowhere in city reports from the

time of relocation have I found expressions of doubt that Africville could be removed. Nor does there seem to exist a concern with justifying the removal through official channels. Instead, a common-sense logic prevails, composed of interwoven themes of understandings to which “we,” as rational, race-neutral beings, are assumed to adhere. I soon felt forced to realize that it may be precisely the legality of the process that is so strikingly violent. This violence of the legal process is an integral thread in the common-sense discourse of relocation that, from a relatively privileged perspective, is easy to miss. In his discussion of liberal discourses of desegregation, as applied in various contexts, Goldberg summarizes well what I felt to be the imprecision of the legal process:

... law's necessary commitment to general principles, to abstract universal rules, to develop objective laws through universalization, is at once exclusive of subjectivities, identities and particularities. ... So when law in its application and interpretation invokes history the reading is likely to be very partial, the more so the more politicized the process becomes. And race, I am insisting, necessarily politicizes the processes it brackets and colors.²⁵

I have seen no legal opening for demonstrating, for example, that to be black, poor, displaced, and faced with the threat of physical removal from your home, in a segregated city in Nova Scotia, is not the same thing as to be white, professional, and arguing that the new mall's parking lot should not be placed in your backyard. There is little framework in place within which to claim that “relocating” in this context is different from simply “moving to a new house,” hoping you'll soon get to know the neighbours. Such assumed neutrality of experience in the eyes of the law is extremely imprecise and misleading, while attempts to understand injustice are made difficult when context does not come into play. As Sherene Razack demonstrates in her analysis of the murder of an Aboriginal woman working as a prostitute in the Canadian West, any attempt to suggest a context in which race, gender, white male violence or discourses around the bodies inhabiting racialized, degenerate zones, is seen to bias the case. She illustrates how this renders particular identities invisible: “Since bodies had no race, class or gender, the constructs that ruled the day, heavily inflected with these social relations, coded rather than revealed them explicitly.”²⁶ More than a matter of having “the wrong information,” which

can then be corrected, the discourses that define what white individuals in positions of power can hear about the subordinate group allow a self-concept of innocence to continue. Elsewhere, Razack writes, "Storytelling as a methodology in the context of law runs up against the problem of the dominant group's refusal to examine its own complicity in oppressing others. The power of law's positivism and the legal rules that underpin it are willing accomplices in this denial of accountability."²⁷

To acknowledge complicity in histories of oppression and violence would be to give up an individual and collective sense of self and place. To ensure that this toehold is intact, the appearance of accountability can be manufactured through such venues as the \$500 "moral claim" given to those residents who could not prove title to their homes. Take for instance the 1994 letter from R. J. Britton, the Halifax director of Social Planning, to City Council, reviewing the options that were perceived to be available at the time: "The City can use its statutory powers to remove the blight and at the same time, temper justice with compassion in matters of compensation to families affected."²⁸ Britton goes on to pronounce the "official story" that is to be known about Africville in public consciousness. This includes clauses assuring city officials that the aggressive bulldozer approach taken in the 1960s was simply the accepted method of "relocation" at the time, that the utmost compassion was given at various stages of negotiation, and that, since the actual cost of relocation was in the end approximately nine times the estimated cost, they can be assured of their benevolence. (On the contrary, it could be seen as their mistake and as evidence that rehabilitating the community might have been possible after all.) Compensation is cited as "at least very fair and perhaps generous." In this telling of the official story, historical distance excuses what are seen as minor glitches in the project of "relocation," and officials are permitted to feel good about their current perspectives and their predecessors' conduct. Moreover, as the "official story" ends, these leaders move beyond compassion to a sense of friendship and celebration: "The City of Halifax does need to recognize the reality of Africville in its history, celebrate the contributions the Africville people made to the City, and to continue to seek and help in their full participation in the life of the City."²⁹

It is clear that within the governmental discourses surrounding Africville, officials define their innocence based on the absence of a legal structure that would hold them accountable in any way. What is perhaps most astounding is the absolute investment in legality as a moral founda-

tion. This investment and the uninterrogated belief in its epistemic assumptions strike one as almost childlike in their simplicity: "If something is illegal, it is wrong; if something is legal, it is correct; if something is not our legal obligation but we offer it anyway, this makes us good." Not only are questions of accountability erased, they are made to seem unequivocally absurd when dominant subjects can believe they have kindly gone "above and beyond" their responsibilities. What is forgotten is that Africville's residents had no part in defining what would constitute these moral parameters, nor in constructing what was a legal or moral way of thought that made racism invisible.

What are the theoretical tools that might interpret the city's intended "slum clearance" or "industrial development" as processes that had, and continue to have, consequences for a poor black community? It is clear that straightforward evidence of racism, or even of what is definable as harm, will not be forthcoming. Richard Thompson Ford offers a detailed study of the manner in which segregation upholds itself even when legislative policy seeks to disband it. Were racial segregation banned, he posits, the structures in place to maintain people's links to specific areas, networks, services, and survival mechanisms devised by various communities, regardless of their differing socio-economic statuses, would see that desegregation remained extremely difficult at best.³⁰ Similarly, Goldberg traces the discriminatory and regulatory consequences of seemingly race-neutral legal rulings. He cites examples from South African apartheid, under which landlords could refuse to rent property to families with more than a certain number of children.³¹ It so happened that Black families tended to have larger than average numbers of children, thus the areas in which they were permitted to live could be "raced" without having to name this intent.

As Africville residents were moved, some were targeted by similar policies, having to give away some of their children or break apart families, forming household structures that differed from those they had known for generations. In some cases, single mothers were required to marry the fathers of their children in order to qualify for the new housing projects,³² thus removing their power of choice to live as they pleased and implementing a value system based on the centrality of the nuclear family, rather than on Africville's sense of community and co-operation among extended relatives and friends. There are lawful ways in which to invoke "universal" values to bolster regulatory measures, as Goldberg points out:

That the State in the name of its citizenry insists on overseeing—*policing*—the precise and detailed forms that housing must take for the poor and racialized suggests that we really are committed to the kinds of disciplinary culture that inform current practice. The principle of agent autonomy so deeply cherished at the core should not, it seems, extend to the periphery; the racially marginalized should not be encouraged to exercise independence (least of all with public monies).³³

In “relocating” them to their new homes, the municipality hoped, perhaps assumed, that Africville residents would melt into their new neighbourhoods, establishing the appearance of a desegregated city regardless of the hostility they might experience from white neighbours and regardless of the great psychic expense they might suffer—an expense that would make it only too apparent “why they wouldn’t just leave.”

□ Stage 3: Burial

Drawing on Heidegger and on architectural theory, David Harvey theorizes the *genius loci*. Taken from the Roman, *genius* refers to a “guardian spirit” which determines the essence of one’s identity. Harvey expands this to explore the essence of identity and community as it is associated with specific central locations. He speaks of how buildings and places absorb relations that occur within them, that these variant relations—to environment, history, physiology, sociality, psychology—become embodied in meanings that are projected onto the *genius loci*. In part, this reading practise begs the distinction of space from “place.” As I intend it, space is the more general term, referring to any conceptual or actual space, including place. Place depicts a space upon which identity is founded. While either may be political, I see place as automatically so, referring to and incorporating notions of “home,” collective history, and social location in reference to an identified group or individual. Place is the more precise term, encompassing the particular meanings embedded in spaces that are of significance to those who occupy them.

Harvey describes place as having a quality of “permanence.” He studies a wealthy, walled community, which insulates itself against the outside world’s perceived danger and degeneracy, as an example of place-making. His “place,” and that of Heidegger whose work he engages, is inti-

mately bound up with identity, roots, belonging, continuity, and readings onto space of particular memories.³⁴ I do not believe that *genius loci* is limited to a connotation of positive or negative meaning-making, but that, depending on how it is used, it can incorporate the violences, inequities, or comforts of how we come to understand our “place” in the world. Harvey’s walled community shifts focus to the way in which dominant subjects make their place in the world through rigid boundary-maintenance designed to keep degeneracy at bay.

In a similar vein, Kathleen Kirby examines the mapping of space as fundamental to the formation of the “Cartesian subject.”³⁵ Speaking of the necessity of establishing identity through the mastery of unknown places, she notes how space, for the privileged newcomer, is studied and “known” while space itself is not actively permitted to “know,” to act back upon, the dominant subject. When this relationship shifts, such disorder is profoundly disturbing to the privileged (usually) white male subject who “explores” and, through mapping, conquers and reformulates space into something felt to be his own. It is in the project of this expropriation, with its concomitant distancing from the environment, that dominant subjects come to know themselves. While Kirby’s theory is set out among “New World” explorer narratives, a greatly similar mechanism is at work in Africville, where white panic over the possibility of an enduring black presence is played out in a continual project of re-examining, rezoning, and reformulating the environment, making it clear who is in control and who may not achieve this subjugation of space.

A new stage in this project began in the 1980s when the city established Seaview Memorial Park on Africville’s former site. Named after Seaview Church, which was destroyed before the rest of Africville, the park lies under a major bridge between the cities of Halifax and Dartmouth and winds for several acres along a stretch of waterfront. Landscaped as a gently rolling green space, the park provides benches overlooking the water and gravelly walking trails. A paved parking lot has replaced the oily dirt roads former residents have described. When the park was opened in 1985, the city’s mayor announced plans to build a swimming pool there—on this site where Africville had been denied the installation of water lines throughout its existence.³⁶ A reunion with several hundred former Africville residents or descendants and their families takes place there each summer. In 1988, a monument was built near the park’s entrance, engraved with the names of the area’s first Black settlers. This monument is the only

visible evidence that Africville once existed, and even its tribute does not tell the story of the destruction of this community.

Standing in the park attempting to feel some semblance of connection to my project, I was struck by the manufactured ignorance and erasure available to someone like myself—born after Africville's destruction, white, never having been taught this element of my province's history. Attempting to map the images in photographs and stories onto the site was futile. The land is not the same shape; it is not the same colour; its contours have been altered. It could easily be seen as a park where Halifax proudly honours a founding Black family and a community that happened to blend silently into the city's past. Unless one knows, nothing in sight speaks to the history of this space.

To read the park as *genius loci*, I believe, helps to situate it as a site of evidence with multiple meanings that can be read onto it, or onto the monument itself, depending on the histories and awarenesses people bring to it. As much as the monument shapes memory and dictates how we are to remember the story it depicts, it is important to remember that socially made preconceptions interact with our interpretation of what is being presented. Obviously, those who enter Seaview Memorial Park as their "place," or as a grounded symbol of continued resistance, will define this locale differently from those who remember driving to Africville to dump their garbage. Different still are the definitions of those who have never been to the city before, who visit as tourists or newcomers and "receive" a history that has been laid out for them, even as they bring specific conceptual tools to its interpretation. For them, the space says nothing of the violence that has been enacted upon it. It is in this act of burying the true story and dramatic transformation of the land that forms a poignant link in the chain of events that evicted Africville from its own space.

In the compression of time and space embodied in the monument and in the park, what might prevent us from seeing space as possessed of a history, of seeing the land we stand on as intimately problematic? What is buried beneath this symbol of remembering, or what truths does it hold down? It seems that the emptiness of space, here, is another form of *genius loci* for the Cartesian subject, who is complicit or silent in Africville's dislocation. In hiding the evidence where the community once stood, the city continued to produce an ongoing regulation of space to serve the purpose of memory-making. It predetermined how the space was to be received—as recreational land, a "neutral" greenspace open to "anyone." As non-Black

outsiders, we can imagine little more than a mythic existence of a Black community, either romantic or slumlike, well in the past. In knowing ourselves through its reclamation and subjugation, we return to our "place" and know that it is not that place, which existed only as a site of intolerable disarray awaiting our inevitable intervention and organization.

The monument and park may foster a collective white belief in a sense of innocence or, in what Jane Jacobs has called "reconciliation." Tracing the effect of "Aboriginal walking tours," which display Aboriginal cultural artworks alongside traditional colonial monuments in the urban space of Melbourne, Australia, Jacobs explores the narrative of reconciliation that underpins this public positioning of histories. In its attempt to unite historically colonized and colonizing groups under a common national identity, reconciliation "attempts to bring the nation into contact with the 'truth' of colonisation—and this includes the attendant emotional 'truths' of guilt, anger, regret and hurt—in order that there might be a certain 'healing.'"³⁷ The anxieties this discourse raises among non-Aboriginals as to their understandings of their past and their place in the nation's history are, in Jacobs's view, rekindling a more overt racism imbued with a sense that Aborigines now possess too much power and privilege.

Would this sort of defensive hostility result from attempts to retell the truth of Africville's history in the public forum? Do the monument and park, along with more recent acceptance of memorials in the form of plays, music, and art displays, incur a sense of reconciliation among white Halifax residents, a sense that they have gone far enough in paying tribute to "unfortunate" events of the past? Informally expressed regret, combined with the more common-sense notion that Africvilleans are "still bitter" and should "put the past in the past," fail to expose personal and collective complicity, much less to ignite a strong public legal move towards material compensation. Further, they allow a sense of personal achievement in having come to a point of understanding, of believing we relate to what happened, that we regret what those before us did, while remaining distinct from the whole mess. As in the Australian case Jacobs describes, we have seen heightened resentment against Africville residents who are making demands at the government level, while many white residents assert that the city has been generous and compassionate where there was no racism to begin with.

How might the way in which the Africville story is "told" enable a dominant, privileged audience to receive a message of complicity and

responsibility? As Lefebvre writes, "Monumental space offered each member of a society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage."³⁸ To usefully explore the social visage of a community that forced the dislocation of others, it is crucial to understand the way we remember or forget, but we also must look further to determine the historical understandings and memories we bring to the Africville monument. When these remembrances are disconnected from the actual space, as they are in most white public consumption of the story, the story may retain a mythic quality, like an entertaining but "unreal" war narrative from ancient history. The potential of a physically grounded analysis, in which we can hear the story from the perspectives of former residents and connect it to their space, is lost.

□ Silencing the Ghosts

In 1994, there was a resurgence of municipal panic when two brothers, former Africville residents, occupied Seaview Memorial Park. They were protesting the lack of compensation and demanding renewed claims on Africville land. The Carvery brothers, teenagers when they left Africville, set up camp in Seaview on the site of their former home for over a year, getting through a cold winter with only a tent and a few survival implements. The authorities failed in their repeated threats and attempts to evict them, which included locking the park's only public washroom.³⁹ Their protest took place at the same time that the city was preparing to host the G7 summit. To allow the ghosts of Africville (though in reality very much alive) to seep through the carefully managed fabric of a well-tended burial would cause Halifax worldwide embarrassment—whether over a failure to manage "its blacks" or over leaked knowledge of its injustices is not clear.

News reports during this time reflect a daily concern with the presence of the Carvery brothers in the park and cite complaints from Halifax residents who claimed the Carverys' protest "took away from their enjoyment of the park."⁴⁰ A few months before the summit, despite widespread protest from the Black community, a law was passed that forbade citizens to camp in public parks overnight. Mayor Fitzgerald, who earlier claimed his government had "bent over backwards" in attempt to negotiate with Africville protesters, cited the new ordinance as falling under the *Protection of Property Act*. In contrast to two days earlier, when the city had had

no legal recourse against those sleeping overnight in a city park, he was able to announce that "people are in the park illegally and we want them off."⁴¹ The Carverys eventually moved their protest just outside the park's border, to an area that did not fall under municipal jurisdiction. As the city alone could not evict them without provincial and federal consent, they maintained their campsite for several more years.⁴²

The city's destruction of Africville was the culmination of a moral panic at the possibility of an independent, sovereign blackness. The nation makes itself not through exclusionary practice alone, but, to borrow Sibley's term, through "geographies of exclusion."⁴³ Through the desecration of space as black, the appropriation of space as white, the suppression of the story of this violence and the denial of accountability, the life of Africville is grounded upon a geography of racism and its discursive organization. Like the proverbial lie, once told, the story necessitates the telling of a chain of "maintenance fictions," complete with the management of space in such a way that the fictions prevail intact and that oppositional stories remain buried. For the purposes of demonstrable racist harm, it will never suffice to engage in a strictly information-based investigation, for it can never be proven within such a paradigm that Africville was destroyed because a black presence was disdained.

The legal, social, and historical logic of "relocation" tells us that the city's actions were unfortunate but necessary, humanitarian, compassionate, non-racist, integrative, progressive, and, perhaps above all, innocent. A conceptual analysis of the regulation of space over time helps us look beyond this, perhaps because it asks as many questions as it answers: Why was industrial development *not* carried out? Why was "empty" recreational space created instead? Why didn't this take place in a white neighbourhood? Why is there no dump in the city's prosperous south end? Why does the city still speak of "black areas" in derogatory ways? For it appears that the discourse of integration, never realized, is more a discourse of erasure from sight and site.

Africville's story does not begin in 1962; it does not even begin in 1862. It begins in slavery, in Preston, in the founding of Halifax and the nation, in the hunting of the Mi'kmaq by British settlers.⁴⁴ In short, our perceptions of what functions as "evidence" must shift to allow the building of a context of ongoing oppression that may inform the way such issues are approached in law, to re-examine common key assumptions about fairness and equity

which, by design, will serve the case badly. Our framework must shift from one of innocence or pity to one of justice.

Legal decision making follows social histories that include poverty and racism. Such histories rely upon complex narratives of blackness that operate in the making of the slum. In turn, legal policy is producing further histories that perpetuate racist practice. These phenomena operate as threads knotted together; to remove any one would make the story of Africville qualitatively different. To discuss any one in isolation is to belittle and betray any attempt at truth or justice. In drawing continuities along a chain of evictions, burials, denials, and complicities through time, their logical sequence becomes evident: depriving the community of essential services; defining the community as slumlike based on the conditions this deprivation promotes; dislocating both persons and space, claiming the inevitability of destruction; altering the space and redefining its purpose and use by opening a park; installing a monument to suggest a sense of reconciliation; suppressing the true story when it resurfaces, and legislating restrictions on protesters who resurrect it.

As I have tried to demonstrate, the legal moves inherent in Africville's history as a degenerate site become clearer when a spatial analysis is permitted to trace and broaden the scope of what are considered to be regulatory measures. If we want to resist the official story, we must insist that history be alive and visible, and look at Africville's destruction not as a segment of the past but as fabric in the history of the present.

Delivering Subjects

Race, Space, and the
Emergence of Legalized
Midwifery in Ontario

Sheryl Nestel