Race, White Settler Liberalism, and the Nova Scotia Archives, 1931–1976

IAN MCKAY

Le présent article examine le traitement que les Archives de la Nouvelle-Écosse ont accordé aux questions de race de 1934 à 1976. Le colonialisme de peuplement blanc est un élément essentiel d'une grande partie du travail archivistique et de la réflexion historique d'archivistes-historiens tels que D.C. Harvey et J.S. Martell. Une nouvelle cohorte d'archivistes, représentée par C.B. Fergusson et Phyllis Blakeley, a conservé la même perspective après 1945. À la fin des années 1960, à cause notamment des idées de la nouvelle gauche, les excuses pour l'empire ont fait place aux examens critiques de la race et du colonialisme, comme l'indiquent les travaux précurseurs de Robin Winks et de James St. G. Walker.

This article explores the ways in which the Nova Scotia Archives confronted questions of race from 1934 to 1976. White settler colonialism provides a key to much of the archival work and historical reflection of such archivist-historians as D.C. Harvey and J.S. Martell. That outlook was preserved after 1945 by a new cohort of archivists, represented by C.B. Fergusson and Phyllis Blakeley. By the late 1960s, partly because of New Left ideas, apologies for empire ceded place to critical examinations of race and colonialism, as suggested by the pioneering works of Robin Winks and James St. G. Walker.

AS 1968 BEGAN, PHYLLIS BLAKELEY WAS WORRIED. As assistant archivist of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, she not only welcomed countless historical researchers but also provided many young Nova Scotians with their first interpretation of the province's history. But now her province, and her identity, seemed to be coming into question, as she encountered people who did not share her belief in Nova Scotia's steady progress as a loyal contributor to Canada and the British Empire. Radicals were criticizing racism in Nova Scotia. It seemed to Blakeley that leader Burnley A. (Rocky) Jones, with his widely publicized calls for "Black Power," was among their most vexatious.[1]

1 Jones's own memories can be found in Burnley "Rocky" Jones and James St. G. Walker, *Burnley 'Rocky' Jones: Revolutionary* (Black Point: Fernwood, 2016), 122–3. I would like to thank Shirley Tillotson, James St. G. Walker, Harvey Amani Whitfield, and the anonymous

Ian McKay, "Race, White Settler Liberalism, and the Nova Scotia Archives, 1931–1976," *Acadiensis* 49, no. 2 (Autumn/automne 2020): 5–33.

She shared the views of another employee at the Archives that "those Black Power people down in the States . . . they're just like the gangsters down there," and thought the federal government should look into deporting Jones – whom she mistakenly took to be a "negro who came here from the States."[2]

A year later, Blakeley was even more agitated. It seemed to her that the province had been flooded by outsiders. "Never has there been so much interest in the history of Negroes in Nova Scotia as there was this autumn, practically all of it in preparation for Human Rights Day in December which turned out to be rights for Negroes, no one else," she complained. She had confronted "various Jewish ladies," Jim Walker from Toronto "who is doing his PhD on the negro, Rocky Jones," and assorted newspaper and radio people – "none of them belonging here, none of them with the training to do research and make any sense out of what I showed them, and all looking for the sensational, not the truth." Exposés on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation dwelt upon the dire deficiencies of the overcrowded African Nova Scotian schools and the racist treatment accorded the famous Nova Scotian operatic contralto Portia White, who had been refused permission to eat at Halifax's Lord Nelson Hotel. "I saw red," Blakeley wrote, in response to what she took to be this many-headed hydra of unfair criticism of her beloved province. Although she had always "sympathized with the plight of the negro," treated them as individuals, and knew quite a number through the Baptist Church, she now felt obliged to "examine my attitude." For her, Jones was a troubling sign of the times: telling African Nova Scotians "what they wanted to hear about taking over the world," "a communist who wanted to take over the government," importing Black Panthers from the United States, and even extracting promises from the premier for "more adult education and vocational training classes, negro history put into school textbooks, equal opportunity etc."[3]

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reviewers of this journal for wise counsel and critical responses. An earlier version of this article was presented to the 2019-20 "Race and the Colour of Democracy" series at the Wilson Institute for Canadian History, McMaster University. Throughout this article I use "Indigenous" and "African Nova Scotian" to refer to the most prominent racialized minorities in the Province, reserving "Indian," "Black," and "Negro" (sometimes uncapitalized) for direct quotations from primary sources or when referring the titles of organizations. Throughout this article the "Archives" refers to the Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS, fd. 1931), which later in the 20th century went by the name of Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management and, after 2010, became the Nova Scotia Archives (NSA). The footnotes in this article utilize the current name.

2 Phyllis Blakeley to Claribel (Gesner), 24 January 1968 (with internal note of 17 February 1968), Blakeley Fonds, MG1 (BF), vol. 3053, no. 6, NSA.

3 Phyllis Blakeley to C. Gesner and Gladys Black, 27 January 1969, BF, vol. 3053, no. 22, NSA. For an invaluable guide to the Halifax context, see Ted Rutland, *Displacing Blackness:*

Blakeley was a prominent figure in an important cultural institution. From its establishment in 1857, the Public Archives of Nova Scotia had been centrally concerned with upholding the honour of the British Crown. Much of the mission of such a colonial archives was the documentation and defence of the empire's policies, especially with respect to the racialized minorities it had felt obliged to dispossess (Mi'kmaq), deport (Acadians), or marginalize (African Nova Scotians). Yet, by the 1960s, insistent subaltern voices, Jones's among them, were challenging this framework. This article examines the ways this colonial archives – meaning the Public Archives of Nova Scotia and historians founding much of their authority upon its documents – handled delicate issues of race and belonging from the 1930s to the 1970s. It focuses mainly on such leading figures as D.C. Harvey, C. Bruce Fergusson, and Blakeley herself, before taking a brief look at a new cohort of historians who, from the 1960s on, unsettled the previously unquestioned liberal imperial perspective.

The settler liberal template

Whether consciously or otherwise, those safeguarding Nova Scotia's archival documents and publicizing the lessons to be learned from them adhered to a settler-colonialist paradigm reducible to five essentials:

> (1) European settlers discovered a mainly unsettled wasteland or wilderness in North America, a *terra nullius*; insofar as human beings inhabited it at all, they were savages, barely distinguishable from nature;
>
> (2) Such settlers brought with them inherently superior liberal concepts of property, social order, religion, individualism, and political freedom, which gave them the right and the duty to develop a society and culture in which such values were paramount;
>
> (3) Although settler colonists were superior to Indigenous inhabitants, not all of them were created equal: the British brought with them traits of civility and order inaccessible to other (e.g., Acadian) settlers;

Planning, Power, and Race in Twentieth-Century Halifax (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 209–25.

> (4) After the mid-19th century, such settler colonial postulates could be correlated with those emanating from scientific racism, with particular emphasis on those affirming the intrinsic inferiority of non-whites;
>
> (5) All of which meant that the "doers" and "makers" of history were the British colonizers; those over whom they rightly ruled were conversely to be interpreted either as obstacles to civilization's progress or the passive, inferior beneficiaries of those who made civilizational progress possible.

These assumptions were very much alive in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, which began life in 1857 as a project of local patriotism strongly committed to the defence of the colony's reputation as a bulwark of British civilization. More particularly, at its very inception the Archives was for many an exercise in damage control that was inspired by an agenda of defending Nova Scotia's civilizational credentials against critics who, focused on the British Crown's Deportation of the Acadians in 1755 and fired by Longfellow's poem *Evangeline*, were impugning its reputation. One way of defending Nova Scotia was to use the colony's archive of state papers to demonstrate that the Crown had responded with restraint and humanity to plain evidence of French wrongdoing, with the mass expulsion of about 10,000 Acadians coming as the regrettable but necessary consequence of enemy provocation and duplicity.[4] What one might call the exculpatory "Acadian template" – i.e., archivally based historical work as a means of colonial reputational damage control – was subsequently brought to bear upon many other issues pertaining to non-British minorities – in particular to the pre-existing Indigenous inhabitants, the Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik, and to the African Nova Scotians who, from the 1750s to the 1810s, arrived in considerable numbers in four somewhat distinct groups: slaves (1750s-1780s), Loyalists (1780s), Jamaican Maroons (1790s), and Refugees from the War of 1812 (1810s).

The close connection between these seemingly distinct modulations of the Archives' settler liberal template can be seen in one of the first major explorations of African Nova Scotian history in the province: Adams G. Archibald's "The Story of the Deportation of Negroes from Nova Scotia

4 See B.C. Cuthbertson, "Thomas Beamish Akins: British North America's Pioneer Archivist," *Acadiensis* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1977): 86–102.

to Sierra Leone."[5] For this leader of the Nova Scotia Historical Society, the expulsion of the Acadians and the eviction of African Nova Scotians were mutually entangled stories.[6] As had been the case with the Acadians in the 1750s, so it was with the Maroons in the 1790s: the honour of the Crown had demanded tough-minded action so that the empire and the enlightened order it embodied might be preserved. If the Acadians had forfeited their right to collective existence on the Nova Scotia peninsula by their collaboration with the Mi'kmaq and the French, African Nova Scotians had done so by their biological and cultural unsuitability as colonists of a northern British colony. Rather than depicting the 1,190 or so of them who left for Sierra Leone in 1792 as men and women logically responding to broken British promises and white hostility, Archibald depicted them as unduly swayed by the addresses of the abolitionist John Clarkson. Such people were vainly attempting to go beyond their inherent natures. "A negro with plenty to eat and to drink, with clothing and shelter, has little care for anything else. He has no ambition," Archibald explained. "To him labor is only a last resort." Archibald wrote in a similar vein of the third significant wave of racialized migrants, the Jamaican Maroons. "Negroes like an idle and lazy life, and have no aim or ambition for anything beyond mere animal existence," Archibald remarked. "These men had no experience of the steady industry required in a climate like ours where shelter and clothing are actual necessities, and where food can not be had without toil or preserved without forethought." Those "we drove from our shores," both Acadians and African Nova Scotians, had thus been done a favour: both groups longed for return to their ancestral lands, both were defective (in different ways) when assessed as free-standing liberal individuals engaged in an exacting project of settler colonialism, and both were better off somewhere else. Such specimens had revealed themselves to be ill-suited to the tasks of transforming a purportedly unsettled Nova Scotia into a free and well-ordered British society.[7]

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5 Adams G. Archibald, "Story of Deportation of Negroes from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone," *Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections* 7 (1889–91): 129–54. For an overview of his life and times, see K.G. Pryke, "Archibald, Sir Adams G.," *DCB Online XII*, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/archibald_adams_george_12E.html.

6 That the two topics were intertwined in Archibald's mind is suggested by the fact that the latter article in the *Collections* on the "Negroes" was based on an address to the society delivered on 12 March 1885 *before* his first presentation on the "Acadians" delivered on 7 July 1886.

7 Archibald, "Story of Deportation of Negroes," 142, 133, 141–2, 148, 152, 153.

Much had changed in Halifax historical circles by the time of the re-foundation of the Public Archives as an "historical laboratory" in 1931,[8] when it acquired a new building, leader, and visibility. Yet Archibald's settler colonial outlook, even his racially charged climatological theses, remained influential. Indigenous people were still considered relics from a vanished time[9] – suitable subjects for amateur white archaeologists assailing old burial grounds or the petroglyphs of Kejimkujik, for local history buffs keen to re-enact the founding of white communities,[10] and for those who wanted an Indigenous backdrop for reconstructed 18th-century forts and battle sites.[11] Although Acadians could not be so completely marginalized, given their role as tourist attractions for *Evangeline*-besotted American tourists and French Canadian nationalistes defending *la survivance*, they were regarded by some, including the enormously influential historical novelist Thomas Raddall, as inferior to Anglos, in part because of their supposed penchant for alliances with Indigenous peoples.[12] Yet, phenotypically white and renowned beyond Nova Scotia's borders, in the province's iconic "White Races" promotion of 1936 the Acadians were accorded status as one of them (the others were the Scots, Irish, English and "Hanoverians").[13] The races not considered white – primarily African Nova Scotians and Indigenous peoples – were placed firmly on the margins.

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8 Carman V. Carroll, "Developing 'an Historical Laboratory': The Genesis of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia," in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, ed. Barbara L. Craig (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 178-211.

9 It is true that Harry Piers, the deputy keeper of the province's public records, curator of the provincial museum, and (unofficially) the leading archivist from 1899 to 1931, had developed a respectful relationship with the Mi'kmaq, but his archaeological approach was consistent with regarding them as figures from a bygone age. See Harry Piers Diary, MG 1, Piers Fonds (PF), vols. 1046-7, entries for 1, 30, 31 May 1913, NSA.

10 See Alison Norman, "'A highly favoured people': The Planter Narrative and the 1928 Grand Historic Pageant of Kentville, Nova Scotia," *Acadiensis* 38, no. 2 (Summer/Winter 2009): 116-40.

11 RG 53, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management Fonds (AF), NSA: Reverend George W. Beck to D.C. Harvey, 6 November 1934, vol. 4, "1934, A-C"; Beck to Harvey, 5 December 1935, vol.5, 1935, "A-C"; Albert Almon to D.C. Harvey, 8 April 1935, vol. 4, "1935, A-C"; Mrs. J. Brown to D.C. Harvey 24 January 1935, vol. 5, "1935, M-Mc/Mac"; H.H. Simpson to D.C. Harvey, 7 June 1935, vol. 5, "1935," 5.

12 On the most sustained attempt to depict them as racially inferior by novelist Thomas Raddall, see Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In The Province of History: Tourism and the Romance of the Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's, 2010): 216-27.

13 See Nova Scotia, Department of Highways, *Nova Scotia: Canada's Ocean Playground* (Halifax: Department of Highways, n.d. [1936]), inside back cover. For a detailed discussion, see McKay and Bates, *In the Province of History*, 3-17. The so-called "Hanoverians" were the "Foreign Protestants," primarily German-speaking and rarely from Hanover, who settled on the South Shore in the 18th century.

This emphatically *white* form of early multiculturalism reflected the viewpoint of D.C. Harvey (1886-1966), the PEI-born former Rhodes scholar who became the provincial archivist in 1931.[14] Harvey had refined his Canadian nationalism and liberal imperialism while a history professor in Winnipeg, where he was much influenced by the legendary journalist J.W. Dafoe.[15] Harvey's attitude towards race was ambiguous. "The biological heritage of the Maritimes," he declared in 1934,

> was such as to cheer the most fanatical of Nordics. The foundation stock, whether Acadian, English, German, New England, Loyalist, Scottish or Irish was to the scientist all of one race, differentiated only superficially by historical experience. On biological grounds they were all susceptible of fusion into one homogenising people.

Yet although "no racial or colour barrier to intermarriage exists," Acadian, American, Scottish, and Irish had married "within their own groups, and the unity that exists is political and geographical rather than biological." He considered "harmless" the tendency of each group to elevate itself over the "lesser breeds" and consider itself "God's chosen people."[16]

Did Harvey himself put any credit in the race theories of "the most fanatical of Nordics?" His tone of studied ambiguity on this question was carried over into public lectures on the CBC in 1935 about "The Colonization of Canada."[17] The next year he brought out a book with Clarke Irwin with the same name.[18] "Those who are interested in racial divisions on biological rather than linguistic lines can and do argue that these colonists were a nordic people,

14 For a path-breaking work on interwar white multiculturalism, see Daniel Meister, "The Racial Mosaic: Race, Cultural Pluralism, and Canadian Multiculturalism" (PhD diss., Queen's University, 2019) and Meister, "'Anglo-Canadian Futurities': Watson Kirkconnell, Scientific Racism, and Cultural Pluralism in Interwar Canada," *Settler Colonial Studies* 10, no. 2 (February 2020): 235-56.

15 See Kurt Korneski, *Race, Nation, and Reform Ideology in Winnipeg, 1800s-1920s* (Madison, NJ, and Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press and Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), chap. 4 for a penetrating distillation of Dafoe's ideological orientation.

16 D.C. Harvey, "The Heritage of the Maritime Provinces," *Dalhousie Review* 14, no. 1 (April 1934): 29.

17 The 14-minute lectures were delivered week by week in a series sponsored by the Universities Conference Committee on Radio in co-operation with the Canadian Radio Commission. See D.C. Harvey, Typescript of "The Colonization of Canada," 1936, MG 1, D.C. Harvey Fonds (HF), vol. 464, NSA.

18 D.C. Harvey and Clarke, Irwin, re *The Colonization of Canada*, 18 February 1936, HF, Add. Mss., 1992-085, file 2, memorandum of agreement.

well-fitted to take root in a northern wilderness," his book said of the Acadians, who had demonstrated their environmental fitness by collectively surviving "in an Anglo-Saxon sea." Unfit to found a settled civilization in North America, conversely, were the Indigenous people who had been present on the continent for centuries. Had there been no European immigration, "the whole continent of North America would still be in the stone-age of civilization and but sparsely settled by wandering tribes of Indians."[19] Because "we and our ancestors" had "made a country out of a wilderness, organized government, improved communications, established religious and educational institutions, developed trade and commerce, and built up a civilization of our own at no small sacrifice of blood and treasure," "we" had the "right to say who shall or shall not enter into this partnership of the living and the dead."[20] Harvey concludes the *Colonization of Canada* with the wry reflection – one that directly echoed a 1929 aperçu of Robert England, another analyst of race and ethnicity in Western Canada – that "you cannot make a Frenchman of an Englishman by force, or an Englishman of an Irishman, or an Irishman of a Scot. Nor does history show you can make a Russian of a Pole, an Austrian of a Czech, an Italian of a Jugo-Slav, or a Turk of a Greek." Nonetheless, one might count on a gradual evolutionary process to render the "thirty nationalities within our borders" into a "Canadian civilization" on the condition that everyone realized "that English is the language of opportunity on this continent."[21]

Even by the standards of the day, Harvey was extreme in erasing Indigenous peoples almost entirely from his account. What was colonized in the *Colonization of Canada* was, for all intents and purposes, a *terra nullius*.[22] This erasure fit within Harvey's general interpretation of Canadian history as one "of successive waves of [European] pioneers pushing bravely into the wilderness in the primary quest of comfort and independence for their children, and

19 D.C. Harvey, *The Colonization of Canada* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1936), 48, 144-5.

20 D.C. Harvey, Typescript of "The Colonization of Canada," 1936, MG 1, HF, vol. 464, file 1, NSA.

21 Harvey, "Colonization of Canada," 153; for the earlier passage in England, *The Central European Immigrant in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), see Meister, "Racial Mosaic," chap. 2.

22 In *Colonization of Canada*, Harvey praised the "marvelous achievements" of the *conquistadores* (9) and revered "our European progenitors" (1). Apart from its disparagement of their "stone-age culture," the closest *Colonization* comes to acknowledging the presence of the First Nations is its brief notice of the fact that Champlain wisely chose the Algonquians as allies rather than the Iroquois thereby allowing him to access vital geographical information (23-4).

leaving to those children the derivative quest of culture and urbanity." Those with "rugged constitutions and will to independence" triumphed "over all difficulties."[23]

Defending the honour of the Crown in 1948

Having suffered the 1946 death of his second-in-command, J.S. Martell, a progressive liberal appalled by "our intolerance vs. Jews, Negroes, Chinese"[24] who had gone so far as to say that Nova Scotia did in fact have a colour line,[25] as well as the even more calamitous loss of two of his own children, Harvey was a weakened force in the institution after 1946. He was joined by two new archivists: C. Bruce Fergusson (1911-1978), a military man and civil service examiner whose business-like vision of the "historical laboratory" was evident in his severely factual and sometimes unreadable works and Phyllis Blakeley (1922-1986), whose passion for the local and the uplifting was suggested by her 1949 *Glimpses of Halifax 1867-1900*. Fergusson (like Harvey) supported the governing Liberals and Blakeley the Conservatives, but both were "conservative liberals" keen to preserve and celebrate the achievements of the British Empire, committed to a hierarchical and organically unified social order, concerned to defend the province against the growing numbers of critics of its colour bar in the 1940s and 1950s,[26] and firm believers in Canada's "moral superiority" on questions of race.[27]

Nova Scotia's variant of Jim Crow, if less obvious than the type found in the southern US, was embodied in its unevenly segregated schools, cemeteries, churches, and movie halls, one of which was the venue for the now-celebrated challenge to it by Viola Desmond in 1946. Recurrent race riots (from Birchtown in 1784 to Trenton in 1937) had brought such racial divisions to public attention. In the post-1945 period, racial injustices were not only protested but, thanks to the emergence of African Nova Scotian publications, publicized.[28] There

23 D.C. Harvey, "Preface" to J.S. Martell, *Immigration to and Emigration from Nova Scotia, 1815-1838* (Halifax: Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Publication No. 6, 1942).

24 Martell Diary, entries for 3-5 February 1945 and J.S. Martell to Stage 45, CBC, 5 February 1945, J.S. Martell Fonds, files 75, 82, King's College Archives, Halifax.

25 J.S. Martell, "The Melting Pot in Nova Scotia," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 35, no. 5 (November 1938): 489-90.

26 For a classic study, see C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

27 Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History,* 2nd ed. (1971; Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 381.

28 The issue of the *Clarion* carrying the Viola Desmond story is available on-line: http://www.parl.ns.ca/carriebest/clarionpage.html.

were also new organizations. The "influence and impact" of the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, formed in 1945, was evident in the passing of the Fair Employment Practices Act in 1955 and the Fair Accommodations Act in 1959.[29]

All such developments tested the liberal settler narrative that had powered the Archives since the mid-19th century. This challenge arrived specifically in the form of a communication from Premier Angus L. Macdonald, who fully shared his good friend Harvey's pro-imperial local patriotism. In 1947 Macdonald was visited by one "Mrs. Wilson of the United States . . . with a negro lady," who were both making "some investigation of the history of the negro race."[30] It was Macdonald's request for a pre-emptive strike against a possible American critique of his province's race relations, and not the early stirrings of a anti-racist civil rights movement, that prompted the Archives to bring out Fergusson's *A Documentary Study of the Establishment of Negroes in Nova Scotia between the War of 1812 and the Winning of Responsible Government* as the institution's first sustained attempt at damage control on this terrain.[31]

With the book finally published in 1948, Harvey told one correspondent that it had "exhausted the problem as far as we are concerned and I hope does not reflect too seriously upon Nova Scotian treatment of these immigrants." Here was a repository of information that "would put Mrs. Wilson straight."[32] If the US-based researchers had been engaged in what historian James W. St. G. Walker nicely calls a game of *tua culpa* – "pointing the finger at the racist reality lurking behind the North Star mythology so beloved of Canadians" – the *Documentary Study* would serve (or so Harvey seemingly hoped) as a decisive rejoinder to them.[33]

Made up of 25 documentary appendices and four period maps focused on the refugees of 1815, and preceded by an ambitious historical commentary

29 Bridglal Pachai, "The African Presence in Nova Scotia," *Dalhousie Review* 68, no. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 1988): 142.

30 D.C. Harvey to Emelyn MacKenzie, 18 March 1949 and MacKenzie to Harvey, 31 March 1949, RG 53, PF, vol. 13, file "Mc-W," NSA.

31 Angus L. Macdonald to D.C. Harvey, 26 January 1948, RG 53, PF, vol. 13, NSA; D.C. Harvey, "Preface" to *A Documentary Study of the Establishment of Negroes in Nova Scotia between the War of 1812 and the Winning of Responsible Government*, ed. C.B. Fergusson (Halifax: Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Publication No. 8, 1948).

32 Harvey to MacKenzie, 18 March 1949 and Mackenzie to Harvey, 31 March 1949, RG 53, PF, vol. 13, 1949, file "Mc-W," NSA.

33 James St. G. Walker, "Allegories and Orientations in African-Canadian Historiography: The Spirit of Africville," *Dalhousie Review* 77, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 168.

citing many other historical sources, the *Documentary Study* was, for all its overwhelming empiricism, designed to defend the reputation of the Crown. "Nova Scotia has an honoured place on the scroll recording mankind's advancement in human relations," Fergusson proclaimed. "She has been in the vanguard of those who have successfully striven to abolish political and religious disabilities and, by the time of the War of 1812, might proudly claim the privilege that to touch the soil of this province in itself confers freedom, even on those who had been Negro slaves." He thus confirmed Harvey's observation in the preface that, just as no "color-bar" had legally limited the exercise of the franchise, so too had African Nova Scotians been the beneficiaries of a freedom-bestowing colony.[34]

It was a bold exculpatory move. It bore almost no relation to the empirical evidence contained in much of the *Documentary Study* itself, which somberly recorded the misery, even death by starvation, of many African Nova Scotians. Fergusson relied on two tactics. One was to present almost impenetrable thickets of official detail, all of which went to suggest the practical difficulties confronting well-meaning colonial governors trying to make good choices in stressful times. The second was that of "fast-forwarding," by which all such troubling details were mere prologues to a far happier liberal conclusion: notwithstanding all the hardships, free and strong individuals had eventually prospered.

The first tactic meant presenting detail after tedious detail, without any apparent regard to making the text accessible to a wider audience.[35] In defiance of advancing archival practice, the documents' provenance,

34 Fergusson, *Documentary Study*, 1. Harvey's suggestion that there was no legally enforced "colour bar" in Nova Scotia (with specific reference to the franchise) was simultaneously narrow and vague. That no acts had been explicitly passed by the legislature calling for racial segregation might have been technically true. But the schools, theatres, legion halls, etc., were all operating within the law; those enforcing racial segregation within their operations were not subjected to legal penalties. To that extent the province's widespread but inconsistently applied colour bar was a "legal" one implicitly sanctioned by the government and underwritten by the conventions surrounding private property. For a useful recent appraisal of the province's "educational apartheid," see George D. Perry, *The Grand Regulator: The Miseducation of Nova Scotia's Teachers, 1838-1997* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 230-2.

35 Many documents were presented with almost no contextual discussion; readers were evidently assumed to be familiar with the *dramatis personae* of the province's colonial history and with the intricacies of various legal descriptions of land tenure. The use of specialized legal and landholding terms and untranslated Latin expressions (*Documentary Study*, 11) adds to its authoritative institutional aura, as does the mass of extraneous detail pertaining to the Abolition of Slavery Act in 1833. Needless jargon – such as "praedial" and "non-praedial" to describe labourers on the land and those elsewhere (56) – typify a dryly written text inaccessible to any but those wholly committed to the topic.

context, or purposes were generally left undisclosed, as were the analytical frameworks of the local historians implicitly accredited as trustworthy authorities. And the second tactic entailed an emphasis on a succession of altruistic white benefactors who sought to settle the African Nova Scotians upon the land, provided education for their children, offered financial aid to their churches, and finally bestowed upon them the inestimable liberal gift of Responsible Government. Over the decades, the provincial legislature came through with famine relief, and "gradually the Negroes became more able to fend for themselves, and to assume a larger share in the life of a democratic community."[36] Three documents with dissenting African Nova Scotian voices are drowned out by the many others presenting the opinions of white rulers, administrators, philanthropists, land speculators, and contractors.[37]

One way of approaching the *Documentary Study* is suggested by James Walker who, in a stimulating historiographical overview, describes five distinct but overlapping "orientations" to African Canadian history: "Clients," "Victims," "Achievers," "Community," and "Survivors." In the "clients" orientation, Walker writes "the focus is on white people; black people enter the story as recipients of white justice and white philanthropy; they are cooperative, loyal and grateful." In the "victims" orientation, which emerged with the new sensitivity to human rights, Canadians indulged in a collective exercise of mea culpa, as they responded to the evidence that "Canadian history shared comparable examples of racism with the United States." The "achievers" orientation focuses on those who are able to succeed "according to the criteria of the white world, by their own talents and diligence." In the "community" orientation, there is recognition of African Canadian distinctiveness and the "collective nature of the black struggle in North America." Finally, the "survivors" orientation emphasizes how African Canadians persisted and even flourished despite discrimination.[38]

First, the theme of *clients* predominated throughout the entire publication. African Nova Scotians are presented as the helpless and problematic clients of the colonial government and the imperial authorities. The documented racial barriers of an emergent capitalist labour market, the rigid application of

36 Fergusson, *Documentary Study*, 67.

37 At one point Fergusson seems not to be simply paraphrasing but slipping into his own voice when he hails the "beneficial results" resulting from the withholding of rations from the undeserving poor at Preston in 1816 – i.e., an official policy of enforced starvation; see *Documentary Study*, 41.

38 Walker, "Allegories and Orientations in African-Canadian Historiography," 167–9.

liberal doctrines of the deserving and undeserving poor, the ice cold logic of military men for whom the refugees were just much collateral damage in the struggle of empires: none of these are given any causal weight at all. Instead, the *Documentary Study* is content to leave the impression of African Nova Scotian charity cases as unsuited to the colony's competitive culture and bracing winters and posing a tough challenge for a succession of British governors and functionaries. "The establishment of so many Negroes in the province presented a number of problems," Fergusson declares. "For the newcomers it meant a change to a more northerly climate, and to conditions of life different from those to which these former slaves had been accustomed."[39]

For all the sober realism of that observation, it readily led on to theses that echoed Archibald in implying a sort of *natural* unsuitability. Many of the documents insist upon the wretchedness of the Refugees' assigned tiny plots – "very small dimensions, and miserably sterile" in Governor Colin Campbell's own words – while *also* claiming that the African Nova Scotians were climatically incapacitated. Harvey's preface attributed their acute suffering to a rigorous environment unconducive to plantation agriculture and to the Refugees' acquired or inherent qualities. So it was that sunshine- and slavery-induced subservience conspired to create an indolent population ill-suited to the lives of rugged independence the archivist esteemed. Yet had Harvey's "Nordic" whites, replete with the Protestant work ethic and entrepreneurial drive, been consigned to remote eight- or ten-acre lots on rocky, infertile, or marshy soil, would *they* have prospered? The laments of thousands of white Loyalists, better treated in the main, suggests otherwise. So did, in 1841, Preston petitioners identifying themselves as "Refugees, brought from the Plantations of the southern States." They or their kin had been placed "by Government" upon ten-acre lots, "of poor land, many of them including swamps and likewise entirely barren & unproductive, and none of them sufficient to yield subsistence for a family however skilful and industrious"; there they had "dragged on a miserable existence," with "but few, if any of them, rising above the level of hopeless poverty." Very few white farmers could have survived upon ten acres of good land; on these deficient lots, they would have "presented the same spectacle that the coloured people of Preston have exhibited."[40] In short, within Fergusson's collection itself, one could find subaltern voices sharply critical

39 Fergusson, *Documentary Study*, 13.

40 Fergusson, *Documentary Study*, Appendix XVI, 106, 66; Harvey, "Preface," in Fergusson, *Documentary Study*; Fergusson, *Documentary Study*, Document XXI, 115.

of the climatic argument. As such subalterns suggested, white allegations of supposed tropical lassitude and agricultural ineptitude – hardy perennials indeed among those advocating racist restrictions on immigration – were red herrings.[41] Harvey and Fergusson came perilously close to repeating them.

With regard to Walker's second orientation, which stresses African Canadians as *victims*, the *Documentary Study* can leave no reader unimpressed by the scale of the misery they endured.[42] Yet from the predominant perspective of the *Documentary Study*, these racialized settlers were primarily victimized not by slavery, imperialism, war, or their uncaring white neighbours but by their own inherent deficiencies as human beings. Symptomatic of its emphasis on their failings as individuals is the *Documentary Study*'s drive to relegate slavery itself to the outer margins of the history of the "free society." Recent work, above all that of Harvey Amani Whitfield, has recovered much of the extent and texture of racialized chattel slavery in Nova Scotia; it emerges from his analysis as a lastingly significant component of the social order.[43] Such work challenges the liberal-imperial framework conventionally favoured by the province's historical elite, for whom Nova Scotia was liberated by the British: there were far more slaves from 1759 to 1820 than had been found under the French Regime. And it also challenges notions of Canadian moral superiority: a liberty-seeking Nova Scotia slave in the 1810s would have been well-advised to travel south to a state like Vermont, where the peculiar institution had been abolished as early as 1777.

Given Governor John Wentworth's activities as an exporter of slaves to Surinam, and the abundant other evidence contained in T. Watson Smith's 1898 study of "Slavery in Canada," upon which he draws, Fergusson's tendency to

41 For an excellent discussion of the "climatic argument" with respect to the Jamaican Maroons, see Ruma Chopra, *Almost Home: Maroons Between Slavery and Freedom in Jamaica, Nova Scotia, and Sierra Leone* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 101-11. Governor John Wentworth, for one, thought the argument silly: if they were "'well fed, warmly clothed, and comfortably lodged, I have always found negroes directly from the hottest coasts of Africa have grown strong and lusty in the winter and that they did not suffer by it'" (cited 107). Chopra adds: "Wentworth was partially right. The focus on Nova Scotia's weather had proven a convenient, if mistaken, shorthand to explain British failure to adequately provide for black Loyalists in the 1780s and early 1790s" (107). For a hemispheric interpretation, see Ikuko Asaka, *Tropical Freedom: Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

42 Fergusson, *Documentary Study*, Document XVIII, 111.

43 See, for instance, Harvey Amani Whitfield, *North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016) and Whitfield, ed., *Black Slavery in the Maritimes: A History in Documents* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2018).

imagine a Nova Scotia pervasively resistant to slavery is puzzling.[44] It misses the extent to which the colony was part of an empire whose wealth and power (and, historian Sven Beckert argues, expanding cotton industry)[45] were significantly enhanced by the transatlantic slave trade. Throughout both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, slaves were treated not as fellow human beings but as military assets, war booty useful for filling the empire's manpower requirements, and as leverage against the Americans. And the implication that African Nova Scotians could live in liberty in the province after the early 19th century oversimplifies their more complicated situation: first, by overlooking how divided legal opinion in the province was on the legality of slavery; second, by disregarding the many ways in which indentured labour and sharecropping closely paralleled slavery; third, by minimizing the very real danger of re-enslavement at the hands of whites interested in making a quick profit; and fourth, by underestimating the extent to which the legacy of racialized chattel slavery stigmatized African Nova Scotians for many generations after 1830 – even those who arrived with no slavery in their background. Amid all the detail of their acute distress, the reader of the *Documentary Study* might miss the salient structural fact that the divvying up of land to Loyalists generally took place in accordance with the size and value of the estates they had left behind, which meant that grants to former slaves, when some of them did finally emerge from the system, were often tiny and sold only with difficulty.[46] Slavery, which both Harvey and Fergusson minimized as a force in the early 19th century, thus powerfully shaped the lives of many who had arrived as, or later became, free British subjects.

Harvey's introduction paid special attention to emphasizing *achievers*, those talented and energetic individuals who were able to triumph over natural obstacles to become leaders. Over time, African Nova Scotians – such as

44 When we read in the *Documentary History* of Dalhousie's impression of African Nova Scotians as "miserable creatures" who would fail to respond even to the proddings of necessity and display "'industry & frugality'" thanks to "the habits of their life and constitutional laziness" (32-3), it is useful to place such comments, not only in the context of an emergent liberalism, with its doctrines of the deserving and undeserving poor, but within an older slavery tradition. Wentworth's shipping of 19 slaves to Surinam (Dutch Guyana) is mentioned by Fergusson only in a footnote (34n107). Fergusson here draws on T. Watson Smith, "The Slave in Canada," *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society for the Years 1896-98* 10 (Halifax: Nova Scotia Printing, 1899), 119, but chap. 3 of the same source, 72-122, suggested a far wider, if also contested, support for slavery on the part of many Nova Scotians.

45 Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015).

46 I am grateful to Shirley Tillotson for clarifying this point.

William Hall, who fought valiantly for the empire in the Siege of Lucknow, star boxers Sam Langford and George Dixon, and opera singer Portia White – learned how to become the individuals liberal Nova Scotia apparently wanted them to be. On the other hand, although usually keen to extol the sacrifices and resourcefulness of stoical pioneers, Harvey and Fergusson revealingly withheld such settler credentials from these African Nova Scotians.[47] Their homesteading earned them no accolades as rugged individuals.

Which leads us to the fourth of Walker's orientations – community.[48] Perhaps the most striking evidence of communal solidarity documented in the study can be found in the resistant responses of such communities as Hammonds Plains and Preston to various schemes for their removal to other parts (most ambitiously, in the 19th century, to Trinidad). Stubbornness and superstition were emphasized by some sources as explanations for their resistance to being transported, but another reading seems equally plausible: perhaps they were strategically reckoning with the risks incurred by racialized subalterns within an empire in which slavery was still up and running (including, until 1834, in Trinidad itself).

Turning to the last of Walker's orientations, *survival*, one can re-read the *Documentary History* as offering compelling evidence, not of Harvey's and Fergusson's thesis of subaltern inadaptability on the grounds of climate and character, but of collective resilience in a perilous situation. Much of Preston survived by supplying Haligonians with market berries, Christmas wreaths, charcoal, staves, and shingles; in Hammonds Plains one found a distinctive population of African Nova Scotian male coopers and women pursuing a diversity of occupations.[49] Many African Nova Scotians stoically insisted upon their right to free title to their lands from 1815 to 1842. They persisted in this demand over the decades, braving famine and white ostracism, often pitching it in terms designed to appeal to widely shared values of "patient industry

47 Harvey, "Preface," in Fergusson, *Documentary Study*; Fergusson, *Documentary Study*, 67, 32-3, 41.

48 For excellent discussions of community among the racialized refugees, see Harvey Amani Whitfield, "'We can do as we like here': An Analysis of Self-Assertion and Agency Among Black Refugees in Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1813-1821," *Acadiensis* 32, no. 1 (Autumn 2002): 29-49; Whitfield, "Black Refugee Communities in Early Nineteenth Century Nova Scotia," *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* 6 (2003): 92-109; and Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border: The Black Refugees in British North America, 1815-1860* (Burlington: University of Vermont Press, 2006).

49 See Suzanne Morton, "Separate Spheres in a Separate World: African-Nova Scotian Women in Late-19th-Century Halifax County," *Acadiensis* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 61-83.

and frugality."[50] It would be easy to overlook, because the *Documentary Study* does not dwell upon it, that some subaltern activists at Preston finally did win their long struggle and received their grants on 3 May 1842.[51] And equally unrecognized, amid all the study's intimations of passivity, were the significant movements of African Nova Scotians voting with their feet as they pursued jobs outside the province.[52]

A defence of the *Documentary Study* might be that it merely reprinted documents, for the contents of which neither Harvey nor Fergusson bore any responsibility. Certainly, by collating them and making them available to a wider public – Fergusson even made sure multiple copies were sent to the Halifax Colored Citizens Improvement League[53] – these two archivists were making a little-known history more accessible. Yet such a defence only goes so far. The authors incongruously placed their empirical evidence within a patently exculpatory liberal-imperial framework, one that emphasized only some details and erased others. The *Documentary Study*'s apparently pristine empiricism was based upon a robust ideological foundation. That all immigrants to Nova Scotia enjoyed "equal social and political privileges" seemed to be an article of liberal faith that no factual evidence could ever shake. The archivists' liberal stress on *formal* equality (which was itself surely qualified in a society that still featured slavery down to the late 1820s) obscured the blatant centrality of *actually existing* inequality. As David Sutherland reveals, African Nova Scotians' entry into the electoral process in the 1840s revealed a Nova Scotia that bore little resemblance to that of Fergusson and

50 Fergusson, *Documentary Study*, 47, 50–1.

51 In 2020, the Nova Scotia Supreme Court ruled that systemic racism had contributed to one African Nova Scotian's difficulty in establishing clear title to his property in North Preston in a precedent-setting decision that declared "African Nova Scotians have been subjected to racism for hundreds of years in this province. It is embedded within the systems that govern how our society operates. This is a fundamental historical fact and an observation of present reality"; see *Downey v. Nova Scotia (Attorneys General)*, 2020 NSSC 201, https://decisions.courts.ns.ca/nsc/nssc/en/item/482093/index.do. The decision may affect the way "future land claims in predominantly Black communities in Nova Scotia are examined," according to CBC reporter Kayla Hounsell; see "Black N.S. Man was Unfairly Denied Title to Land," https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/n-s-supreme-court-land-title-systemic-racism-1.5654466. I thank Donald Wright for this reference.

52 See especially Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870–1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

53 Harvey and Fergusson maintained friendly relations with the Halifax Colored Citizens Improvement League, whose president B.A. Husbands told Fergusson how much he had appreciated the archivist's recent participation in Emancipation Day events; see B.A. Husbands to C.B. Fergusson, 10 August 1950, MG 1, C.B. Fergusson Fonds (FF), box 1800, folder 1, NSA.

Harvey: racial conflict exploded on the downtown streets of Halifax on 29 July 1847, when activists from Preston and Hammonds Plains sought to influence the outcome of the contest; and a host of belligerent editorials in the 1850s declared white animosity towards them: "Every time they became involved in the mainstream political process, one party or the other was likely to react by calling for segregation of the races," Sutherland concludes.[54] "Through a paradox," Harvey suggested in 1948, "equal and social privileges for negro and white immigrants actually meant discrimination against the former: for the government could not create the conditions that would enable them to qualify for the exercise of those privileges."[55] Could not — or would not? The possibility that the colony's rulers served a white supremacist British Empire and colony and deployed a coherent settler ideology that denied equality to racialized individuals apparently seemed unthinkable for him.

In 1971, Fergusson made one more significant contribution to the history of African Nova Scotians by bringing out *Clarkson's Mission to America 1791-1792*. This, the institution's 11th book-length publication, documented the campaign by John Clarkson to aid racialized Loyalists emigrate to Sierra Leone. The exculpatory template remained front and centre. In Fergusson's vision, Clarkson's account revealed a "public-spirited and humanitarian enterprise designed to improve the lot of some of the negroes in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and to promote the colonization of Sierra Leone" led by a man exhibiting "amiable frankness, prudent conduct, and tactful management." Still, the hero had his flaws: the "real and imaginary difficulties" Clarkson thought he was confronting were ones he perceived in part because of his "deeply emotional" nature, one "easily stirred by injustice and misery and full of sympathy for the sufferings of the blacks." His impression of a clique opposed to his campaign conflicted, in Fergusson's mind, with the actual fairness and racial impartiality of the colony's rulers in handling the Loyalists' land claims; indeed, such was Governor Parr's partiality towards African Nova Scotians that whites purportedly said they would like to be treated in such a manner. As many as 408 racialized Loyalists "were grantees in Nova Scotia." Why, then, were they so discontented? Channelling the spirit of Archibald, Fergusson thought the answer lay not in the (unmentioned) pitiable size of

54 David Sutherland, "Race Relations in Mid-Victorian Halifax, Nova Scotia, During the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 7, no. 1 (1996): 48.

55 Harvey, "Preface," in Fergusson, *Documentary Study*.

their lots or the emergent weight of racism but rather in their "ancestral urges" that told them to go "nowhere else but to Africa." Although quoting poisonous characterizations of the "sooty Brotherhood," and noting the 1783 riot in Shelburne in which Blacks lost "about 20 of their houses," Fergusson still could not grasp why so many African Nova Scotians, promised lives of freedom, were so keen to leave a colony that systemically denied them.[56]

Bringing race to the classroom

If Fergusson's book can be placed at the "high end" of the Archives' responses to race, Phyllis Blakeley, who combined the roles of archivist and popular local historian, produced far more accessible interpretations of race relations in Nova Scotia in her various articles and textbooks. Her writings were highly influential in the third quarter of the 20th century, and she was widely regarded as an expert on Nova Scotia's cultural history.[57]

Blakeley championed civil rights and "integration." She took pride in the support Paul Hamilton, whom she called the "negro janitor," received from his fellow staff members, who chipped in to buy him a suit appropriate for an appearance before the governor-general: "He did attend the ceremony and received his certificate signed by the governor general – and I am certain that no one in that room realized that he was an example of integration – a white staff rallying behind the only negro to see that he was able to attend."[58] As a member of the congregation of First Baptist Church she had taken a course from Black leader Pearleen Oliver on "The Art of Group Worship," which was "a wonderful course and she is a true Christian."[59] She even placed race and other systems of oppression in historical perspective, drawing a parallel in her correspondence between the 19th-century dislike of Catholics and the way

56 C.B. Fergusson, ed., *Clarkson's Mission to America 1791-1792* (Halifax: Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Publication No. 11, 1971), 7, 9, 23, 18-19, 14, 11, 16.

57 In 1972, she was instrumental in preparing a section on Nova Scotia for a social studies book from Addison-Wesley: "They insisted on the Micmacs, the Acadians, the Blacks and the Scots. I sent in reams and reams of material, rewrote it several times and answered questions, and the final draft was written by their editors." She liked the final product, even though it illustrated Halifax, Nova Scotia, with a photograph of Halifax, England. See Phyllis Blakeley to Claribel Gesner, 28 January 1972 (with internal letter of 3 February), MG 1, BF, vol. 3053, file no. 37, NSA.

58 Blakeley to unidentified correspondent, 17 November 1967, MG 1, BF, vol. 3047, file no.8, PANS.

59 Blakeley to [Shirley Blakeley], 18 January 1952 (with internal letter of 21 January 1952), MG 1, BF, vol. 3045, file no. 17, NSA.

"many whites" felt towards "the negroes today."[60] On this personal level, she was, in her own eyes, a person opposed to racism.

At the same time, Blakeley lived in a city with an unofficial colour bar and systemic notions of racial hierarchy. When "the blackest negro from Harlem" came to the Archives to enquire about Blacks in 1953, Blakeley not only noted his skin colour but remarked upon the person she took to be his white wife: "He seems very intelligent," she added.[61] In her circles, African Nova Scotians were sometimes mocked. Of one social event in 1962, Blakeley wrote: "While we were having tea and cookies they got off onto negroes. No negores [*sic*] being present everyone had a good time and no one's feelings were hurt."[62] It would have been as silly to make a fuss about such light-hearted fun as it would have been to object to the name of 14-year-old Phyllis's family pet, which bore the n-word as its name.[63]

Blakeley in her written work, like Harvey, stressed African Nova Scotian achievers, who implicitly revealed that characterful individuals could prosper in a progressive province. Boston King (Loyalist, Methodist minister, and proponent of the Sierra Leone project) was given a perfunctory treatment in a 1968 piece in the *Dalhousie Review*. King, in his day, had sometimes been acerbically critical of white settlers, but Blakeley emphasized King's admission "that many masters treated their slaves kindly."[64] Equally laudatory was her assessment of William Hall's repression of the irrational and bloodthirsty "natives" of India. Relying upon mere rumour, she related a patriotic tale about how the homesick and heroic Hall resolved to return to his beloved Nova Scotia. Although the old soldier eked out his last days on an impoverished farm with a stingy pension, died more or less penniless, and was buried without military honours in an unmarked grave, he could nonetheless be figured as a patriotic African Nova Scotian who prospered under the empire.[65]

Blakeley's most enduring work of history was not to be found in her articles but in her textbook, *Nova Scotia: A Brief History* (1955), which prevailed in the

60 Blakeley to Claribel Gesner, 28 January 1972 (with internal letter of 3 February), MG 1, BF, vol. 3053, file no. 37, NSA.

61 Blakeley to Gene, 5 August 1953, MG 1, BF, vol. 3045, no. 18, NSA.

62 Blakeley to Shirley Blakeley, 1 February 1952 (with internal letter of 4 February 1952), MG 1, BF, vol. 3045, file no. 17, NSA.

63 Phyllis Blakeley Diary, 13 November 1938, MG 1, BF, vol. 3184, NSA.

64 Phyllis Blakeley, "Boston King: A Negro Loyalist Who Sought Refuge in Nova Scotia," *Dalhousie Review* 48, no. 3 (Autumn 1968): 350.

65 Phyllis Blakeley, "William Hall, Canada's First Naval V.C.," *Dalhousie Review* 37, no. 3 (Autumn 1957): 254, 257, 258.

province's Grade Six classrooms for almost two decades down to the mid-1970s.[66] Blakeley regarded *Nova Scotia* as an archivally rigorous text, one that was endorsed by Harvey and Fergusson. Her book made a lasting impression on many students who might never have visited the Archives.

The textbook provides a succinct and memorable interpretation of Nova Scotia history from a British imperial perspective. The empire's explorers, defenders, and developers are admirable; their opponents are shifty, cruel, and deceiving (although, admittedly, the prisoner-abusing French could at least claim to have planted "the first settlement of white people in Canada"). As had been the case with Harvey, so it was with Blakeley: the history of Nova Scotia was, in essence, the history of white British settlers. And although such whites came in a variety of types, as early as the 1830s "people no longer thought of themselves as New Englanders or Loyalists, Scots or Irish, English or Acadians or Germans, but as Nova Scotians," Blakeley claims. True to the spirit of the white races promotion of 1936, her seemingly inclusive list excises both Indigenous people and Blacks from those who were "proud to be called 'Bluenoses'." Although the textbook counsels its young readers that "a person is a good citizen not because his forefathers were English or Irish or Loyalists, but because of what he is himself, regardless of race, creed, or colour," those for whom skin-colour raised issues in everyday life were, by implication, plainly not on a par with their white fellow citizens.[67]

Indigenous people were not, and perhaps could never be, included among the Bluenoses. In Blakeley, they are shadowy, cruel, ominous presences who were constantly menacing and attacking white settlers and kidnapping their kinfolk. No fewer than three harrowing kidnapping stories, in a book of just 214 pages, seem calculated to leave deep marks on the minds of impressionable readers. In this imagined past, Indigenous people were cruel victimizers and the New Englanders their innocent victims, condemned to pursuing "the Indians" as so many "shadows in the woods." The raid by the French and their Indigenous allies upon the village of Deerfield, Massachusetts, was reconstructed in detail, but closer to home was the raid on Dartmouth in 1750, when the air echoed to war-whoops and "the screams of victims" so loud they could be heard across the harbour in Halifax. The soldiers who arrived on the scene found "eight scalped bodies," while the people responsible for this

66 Phyllis Blakeley, *Nova Scotia: A Brief History* (Toronto and Vancouver: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1955).

67 Blakeley, *Nova Scotia*, ix, 175, 118.

unprovoked attack had "disappeared into the forest." In case Mi'kmaw violence had not registered itself sufficiently upon young minds, Blakeley suggested in the "Things to Do" section that children "Dramatize the Indian attack on Dartmouth."[68] There was no such recommendation with respect to Governor Cornwallis's prior scalping proclamation of 1749.[69]

Thus, in 1955, as in the white races promotion of 1936, the Mi'kmaq were, implicitly, obstacles and enemies to the onward march of British settlers and their liberal order. In her enumeration of the people left behind after 1755, Blakeley counted Halifax merchants, officials, and citizens; German and Swiss farmers and fishers; New Englanders at Canso; and a few "soldiers, farmers, and traders" at Annapolis Royal.[70] With a thoroughness scholars of settler colonialism worldwide will find wholly unsurprising, the peninsula's 18th-century Indigenous majority was simply erased.

Unsuited as they naturally were to severe winters, African Nova Scotians were another group unlikely ever to become fully-fledged "Bluenoses" in Blakeley's books. Slavery was at most a minor issue during the 18th century and had "ceased to exist" by 1800, says Blakeley, disregarding copious evidence readily available for more than half a century. Paralleling Fergusson's more pedantic account, but going beyond him in attributing equality and fairness to the British regime, Blakeley believed that racialized Loyalists coming to Nova Scotia were coming to a land of freedom where "grants of land were given to them just as to the other Loyalists." A similar generosity governed the British treatment of Afro-American refugees after the War of 1812, who were "given farms." It was true that many of them went on to suffer hardships, but this was in large measure because they "came from the warm south" and "were not used to the cold winters and did not know how to protect themselves or their food from the weather." When they were in need, "the British government and the Nova Scotia Assembly gave money to help them," with the result that their descendants had become, if not Bluenoses, at least "good citizens of Nova Scotia."[71]

It is easy to see why the writer of this pervasively influential textbook was unlikely to warm to the transnational currents of revolution and anti-racism in the 1960s and the historians inspired by them. Historian Bridglal

68 Blakeley, *Nova Scotia* 52, 53, 73, 175.

69 Blakeley does, though, briefly note the ten-guinea reward "for every Indian captured or killed"; see Blakeley, *Nova Scotia*, 73.

70 Blakeley, *Nova Scotia*, 107.

71 Blakeley, *Nova Scotia*, 114, 115, 129–30, 115.

Pachai notes the "exciting mix" of such influences of the late 1960s, on the international, continental, and national levels; in Nova Scotia this was typified by the emergence in Nova Scotia of the Black United Front in 1969, which was joined by a number of other anti-racism organizations during the subsequent two decades.[72] What was exciting from Pachai's point of view was bound to be alarming from Blakeley's.

Exculpation revisited, 1960s and 1970s

The troublesome Mrs. Wilson in 1947, who had unknowingly stimulated such a wave of archival damage control, was just one of a series of outside commentators coming to Nova Scotia. After 1945 many visitors from the United States and the rest of Canada arrived, some lured by the promotions of "Canada's Ocean Playground" and the "Land of Evangeline" but others by a more high-minded nationalistic quest to know a region hitherto unexplored by many central Canadians. In May 1956 Edna Staebler, a well-respected Ontario journalist already winning a pan-Canadian reputation for her recipes for "Mouth-Watering Mennonite Meals" and for equally appealing vignettes of the fisherfolk of Nova Scotia,[73] brought out "Would you change the lives of these people?" in *Maclean's Magazine*, based on her visit to New Road Settlement, aka North Preston (about 14 km from Dartmouth) – a place "almost as obscure and sinister as a village in an African jungle." It was inhabited mainly by defective people who, accustomed as they were – even after several generations in Nova Scotia – to "warm southern sunshine, the plantation system and the lash," were "helpless in their new situation."[74] The *Canadian Negro* critiqued it in 1955 as a derogatory portrait of a hard-working community.[75] Even Fergusson condemned her – though not for stereotyping New Road, but for her skimpy archival research.[76] Africville, within the bounds of Halifax, soon eclipsed North Preston as a pathologized place, a veritable "blot" upon the landscape[77] –

72 Pachai, "African Presence in Nova Scotia," 142.

73 For an instructive portrait of her, see Bruce Gillespie, "The Works of Edna Staebler: Using Literary Journalism to Celebrate the Lives of Ordinary Canadians," *Literary Journalism Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 59–75; see also her *Cape Breton Harbour* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972) for a vision of the supposedly simple fisherfolk of Neil's Harbour, Cape Breton.

74 Edna Staebler, "Would you change the lives of these people?" *Maclean's Magazine*, 12 May 1956, 54, 51, 50.

75 Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, 406.

76 Fergusson to Mrs. Esme Rowley, 26 February 1958, RG 53, PF, vol. 19, 1958, file O–Z, NSA.

77 Walker, "Allegories and Orientations in African-Canadian Historiography," 155.

the removal of which seemed, for many liberals, imperative.[78] As in the United States, an initially progressive impulse to chart the "culture of poverty" came to be interwoven with more problematic dismissals of the legacies of African culture in North America.[79]

A similar tension between progressive critique and blaming-the-victim censure can be traced at a more abstract level among liberal historians. In 1968 historian George Rawlyk, who acknowledged the help of Fergusson, brought out "The Guysborough Negroes: A Study in Isolation." His portrait retained a conventional emphasis on the supposed characterological defects of African Nova Scotians – they reportedly revealed a "certain lack of industry and initiative" – yet it broke with the exculpatory narrative with its emphasis on white "racial prejudice," African Nova Scotians' death from starvation on woefully inadequate plots of land, and the widespread illiteracy induced by an inferior educational system.[80]

When Yale historian Robin Winks, inspired by the civil rights and anti-racism movements of the United States, brought out his lastingly influential 546-page *Blacks in Canada: A History*, he brought the critical historiography of race and racism in Canada to a new level.[81] The Archives directly shaped his achievement. Fergusson served as his contact with African Nova Scotian leaders Rev. W.P. Oliver and B.L. Husbands, to whom he had

78 The literature on Africville is now abundant. See especially Tina Loo, *Moved by the State: Forced Relocation and Making a Good Life in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019), chap. 4; Jennifer J. Nelson, *Razing Africville: A Geography of Racism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); and Rutland, *Displacing Blackness*.

79 The "culture of poverty" thesis was developed by Michael Harrington in the United States and Oscar Lewis in Latin America and emphasized the extent to which the poor were held down by their own deeply internalized feelings of isolation, helplessness, and fatalism. It enjoyed a vogue in the 1960s; see Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1962) and Oscar Lewis, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1959). For a contemporaneous critique, see Charles A. Valentine, *Culture and Poverty: Critique and Counterproposals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

80 G.A. Rawlyk, "The Guysborough Negroes: A Study in Isolation," *Dalhousie Review* 48, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 25. The piece was prepared for Dalhousie University's Institute of Public Affairs' report – see D. Clairmont et al., *A Socio-Economic Study and Recommendations: Sunnyville, Lincolnville, and Upper Big Tracadie, Guysborough County, Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Institute for Public Affairs, Dalhousie university, 1965) and drew extensively upon the labour of his graduate students at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia.

81 Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (1971; Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997). Winks had earlier published "Negroes in the Maritimes: An Introductory Survey," *Dalhousie Review* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1968-69): 453-71, which strongly emphasized their supposed quiescence, self-segregation, and long journey to self-respect, as well as "Negro School Segregation in Ontario and Nova Scotia," *Canadian Historical Review* 50, no. 2 (June 1969): 164-91.

earlier sent his *Documentary Study*. Over the next eight years, Fergusson served as an indispensable resource for Winks; for his part, Winks not only warmly acknowledged his help but also relied upon Fergusson's study as an authoritative source.

In many respects, in fact, the traditional exculpatory template remained intact in *The Blacks in Canada*. Confronted with a massive influx of Loyalists, Nova Scotia's rulers had tried their best. The vocal critics of their policy were, Winks insinuated, rather unreasonable – perhaps even, in the case of leader Clarkson, mentally unbalanced. And many racialized Loyalists somehow "did not understand" that the "government was being bumblingly fair with them." The carceral atmosphere of the camp on Melville Island exhibited a philanthropy that was "on the whole . . . sincere enough." Slavery in the Loyalist period might even have been "benign," as it reportedly was on Prince Edward Island. Winks also echoed Fergusson on African Nova Scotian passivity. They were people to whom history happened, not who made history themselves. They were, as Harvey and Fergusson would have put it, a "problem" calling out for a state solution, not people in distinct communities with distinct agendas. Winks wrote one entire chapter in the passive voice, as a way of showing how "Black Canadians were acted upon rather than acting with respect to the subject of the chapter." For him, the racialized refugees who arrived as a result of the War of 1812 provided a case in point. The mere "jetsam" of the war, they were a "disorganized, pathetic, and intimidated body who seemed unable to recover from their previous condition of servitude." Even their independent churches exemplified self-defeating strategies of isolation. What from another standpoint might be seen as a racialized minority's ingenious survival tactics – i.e., "selling brooms, berries, rum, and Christmas wreaths, working as general laborers and stable boys" – were depicted as yet more evidence of its stubborn unwillingness to accept resettlement elsewhere. Like many other African Canadians, they were "often responsible for their own plight."[82]

At the same time, there was much new sobering evidence in *The Blacks in Canada* reflective of the critical atmosphere of the US civil rights movement. Relying on Smith's 1899 work,[83] Winks documented slavery's systemic severities in Nova Scotia: one slave whipped to death at Annapolis, another killed with a hammer in Windsor, a third dragged to his death in Truro. Rather than constituting a marginal element of colonial society (as in Fergusson), slaves in

82 Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, 44, xvii, 114, 124, 140, 43, 133, 480.

83 Smith, "The Slave in Canada," esp. chap. 3: "Treatment of the Slave," 77–81.

Winks could be found "clearing fields, chopping wood against the long winters, and building ships." And Winks notes the enduring strength of "anti-Negro prejudice in Nova Scotia."[84]

If Rawlyk and Winks can be seen as offering *somewhat* revisionist reappraisals of the traditional exculpatory template, James St. G. Walker's *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870* (1976) can be viewed as the archivally based study that most decisively broke with it. Walker, who arrived at Dalhousie from Ontario with a track record of involvement with New Left anti-racist Third World solidarity movements of Toronto, looked at Nova Scotia's 18th-century "Black Loyalists" and emphasized their activism, creativity, and leadership.[85] In his hands, the Sierra Leone expedition of the 1790s became a continuation of the slaves' war of independence. If, for Fergusson, the empire was already trending heavily towards abolition after 1772, Walker is unconvinced by the narrative of an empire that stood for freedom: of all the explanations for the British freeing slaves in the Revolution, "an abolitionist sentiment cannot seriously be included among them."[86]

The African Nova Scotians' dire lot during the 19th century arose from the intersection of class and race: "The blacks of Nova Scotia derived their class from their colour and its associations with slave labour." If many people suffered during the late 18th century, "they took their status not from the body of Loyalists, to which they belonged, but from the mass of slaves whose African race they shared. In many ways their life as freemen was not altogether different from the life of slavery they had left behind." By leaving Nova Scotia, they left behind a "decapitated community" that thereby lost "most of its teachers, preachers and other leaders." The loss perhaps helped explain why, after 1815, there was a "burst of anti-black sentiment among the white officials and population of Nova Scotia." By the 1830s, "White prejudice had become entrenched."[87] In vivid contrast to Harvey, Fergusson, and Blakeley, there was no uplifting fast-forwarding in Walker's book to the 20th-century achievers

84 Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, 43, 51, 28, 46, 127, 140.

85 James St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870* (1976; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017). Although diverging radically from his predecessors, Walker graciously acknowledged the help extended to him by both Fergusson and Blakeley; see vii, xi. For background on contemporary New Left anti-racist mobilizations, see Peter Graham with Ian McKay, *Radical Ambition: The New Left in Toronto* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2019), 133–50.

86 Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 95, 3, 2.

87 Walker, *Black Loyalists*, xix, 32, 42, 48, 57, 125, 386, 392, 395.

who seemingly redeemed the province's troubling racial history. A critical turning point had been reached.

Conclusion

Blakeley's visceral response to anti-racist activism and research in 1968 can be best understood within the context of complex patterns of archival response that extended back many decades. Researching race in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia from the Victorian Era to the late 1960s often entailed situating it on the margins of a complex of myths and symbols centred on freedom-loving white settlers engaged in the global implantation and defence of the British Empire, the liberal hope of the world. Initially this meant a stern defence of the Deportation of the Acadians, sometimes treated as European race traitors though more often as children with unreliable loyalties; but in either case the Acadians were obstacles to the "Empire of Liberty." More emphatically "Othered" races were the Mi'kmaq, often constructed as British civilization's dread enemies for schoolchildren and permitted only the minor historical functions of facilitating or impeding the Anglo-Americans, and the African Nova Scotians, who figured either as the objects of British philanthropy or the refugees rightly drawn towards the "Freedom that Wore a Crown" under whose aegis they slowly learned the ways of liberal individualism.[88] In neither case were members of such racialized minorities really "Nova Scotians." They could be considered at best probationary liberal individuals coming from deficient backgrounds with respect to propertied independence, entrepreneurial competitiveness, and (perhaps) their biologically and environmentally determined characters.

The rapid decline of the British and other empires and the epochal movements of decolonization this shift set in motion worldwide had their counterparts in Nova Scotia with the stirrings of a new historiography, which began with African Nova Scotians but which, over the subsequent decades, would also entail re-imagining Indigenous peoples as active shapers of history.[89] During the 1970s, Dalhousie University became one of the key centres both for the study of African history and that of new regional social history. Rather than the conclusive settling of accounts Harvey had hoped in 1948 that the *Documentary Study* would constitute, it turned out to be but a preliminary

88 See John Farthing, *Freedom Wears a Crown: History of Republican Government and the Impact of the Monarchy* (Toronto: Kingswood House, 1957).

89 An outstanding book in this regard was L.F.S. Upton, *Micmacs and Colonists: Indian-White Relations in the Maritimes, 1713-1867* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1979).

step to a more painful and honest reckoning with the past on the part of many scholars and members of the public beginning in the 1960s and 1970s.

Yet it would be unwise to replace one whig history of imperial progress with another of critical cultural breakthrough. First, academic history-making and the versions of history activating many people may be dramatically different. At the Public Archives in late August or early September 1990, "someone stole all (or nearly all) of the index file cards pertaining to women and blacks, rendering research on those subjects inordinately difficult," reported the *Halifax Daily News*; many of them had been painstakingly drawn up by Blakeley. The removal of the cards suggested, in the words of historian A.A. Mackenzie, "someone with a twisted mind."[90] It might also have been an indication that the historical common sense associated with white settler colonialism and Adams Archibald was far from extinct. A 2006 arson attack on the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre in Birchtown, Molotov cocktails thrown at the Black Cultural Centre in Cherry Brook the same year, a further assault on the centre in 2017 – all were likely indications that those who still believe that the "white races" promoted in the mid-1930s should rule the provincial roost have not vanished.[91]

Second, some of the new local social history came with its own spatial own limitations. Racialized chattel slavery was a socio-economic structure formally recognized as a legal institution in substantial parts of the Atlantic World until the 1890s; where it was abolished, the successor plantation regimes carried forward many of its repressive features. Insofar as Nova Scotia relied upon the West Indies trade, it cannot be disassociated from this enduring socio-economic reality.[92] A full reckoning of slavery's impact upon the region with this global perspective in mind has yet to emerge.

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90 Parker Barss Donham, "A Violation of Our History: Theft of Index File Cards Sours Spirit at Public Archives," *Sunday Daily News* (Halifax), Sunday Perspective, 11 November 1990, 11.

91 See Whitehead, *Black Loyalists*, 190; https://www.digbycourier.ca/news/regional/vandals-hit-new-black-loyalist-centre-in-birchtown-36787/; http://www.shunpiking.org/ol0305/0305-AC-TS-sightof.htm.

92 That Nova Scotians were enmeshed in trading relationships with the West Indies down to the 20th century is not in doubt; that both the plantations buying North Atlantic fish as a cheap source of protein for their workforce, and the producers of the rum many vessels brought home in return, were reliant upon slavery (or forms of post-slavery servitude that bore a strong resemblance to it) has received less attention. For a meticulous examination of slavery's financial contribution to King's College, see Shirley Tillotson, "How (and How Much) King's College Benefited from Slavery in the West Indies, 1789 to 1854", https://ukings.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/202001TillotsonKingsSlaveryIndirectConnections.pdf. Tillotson estimates that 35.7 per cent of the public funding for the college from 1803 to 1833 "came from taxes on slave-produced goods" (15).

And third, a progressive "Whig History" celebrating the achievements of historians since the 1970s might lead to the hasty and hubristic dismissal of all the work of past generations of archivists; many of them, as we have seen, worked within a now-questioned liberal-imperial framework. Yet well beyond the thousands of detailed cards providing empirical details about racialized subalterns that would otherwise be difficult to trace, Blakeley also bequeathed a host of other important references for scholars of race and racism. Fergusson's exculpatory *Documentary Study*, for all its limitations, reproduced primary sources susceptible to readings that were more critical than suggested by his liberal imperial framework. The 21st-century work of Harvey Amani Whitfield and a new generation of scholars of Canadian slavery demonstrate how this archival evidence, much of it brought forward to defend the honour of the Crown, can be put to different postcolonial purposes. White settler liberalism in the archives entailed a systematic effort to defend the virtues of settlers and the wisdom of their imperial and local rulers. But Harvey's, Fergusson's, and Blakeley's historical laboratory also generated a diverse range of other evidence, enabling new historical syntheses that have, over time, called the underlying precepts of settler liberalism sharply into question.[93]

IAN MCKAY est le directeur du Wilson Institute for Canadian History à l'Université McMaster. Il travaille présentement à la rédaction d'un historique des Archives publiques de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Sa dernière publication, écrite en collaboration avec Peter Graham, est *Radical Ambition: The New Left in Toronto* (Toronto, Between the Lines, 2019).

IAN MCKAY is the director of the Wilson Institute for Canadian History at McMaster University. He is working on a history of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, and his last publication, with Peter Graham, is *Radical Ambition: The New Left in Toronto* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2019).

93 For reflections on this question, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). The contemporary institution has been a significant force in changing perceptions of African Nova Scotians; see "African Nova Scotians in the Age of Slavery and Abolition," https://novascotia.ca/archives/africville/https://novascotia.ca/archives/Africanns/BN.asp.