"Our Story is Your Story": Examining Recent Scholarship on Indigenous and Black Commemorations with a Nova Scotian Focus

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Depuis les années 1960, les études muséales et commémoratives ont délaissé les récits axés uniquement sur la colonisation pour favoriser l'inclusion des points de vue des Autochtones et des Noirs. Bien que certains critiques aient condamné l'utilisation abusive que des institutions font de la décolonisation et de la diversité comme des mots à la mode au lieu d'entretenir un dialogue avec les créateurs et leurs communautés, on a observé en Nouvelle-Écosse des progrès considérables au sein des institutions et dans les espaces publics de la province, comme en font foi l'embauche de spécialistes de la commémoration issus des communautés noires et autochtones, la création d'expositions et de musées ou de centres axés sur les perspectives de celles-ci, et la réappropriation d'espaces publics tels que des parcs, des rues et des édifices.

Since the 1960s, there has been a shift in commemoration and museum studies away from settler-only narratives and towards institutional inclusion of Indigenous and Black perspectives. While some critics have condemned institutional misuse of decolonization and diversity, in Nova Scotia there has been meaningful engagement with Black and Indigenous creators and their communities in the province's institutions and public spaces. This is evidenced by the hiring of Indigenous and Black commemoration professionals, the creation of exhibits and museums/centres that focus on these perspectives, and the ongoing reclamation of public spaces such as parks, streets, and buildings.

INVITING VISITORS TO LEARN ABOUT BLACK HISTORY, public historian Cynthia Dorrington stated "Our story is your story and we would very much love you to come down and hear some of the untold stories."[1] Dorrington, the former manager of the Black Loyalist Museum on the South Shore of Nova Scotia, noted that the museum received increased interest in 2020 in the wake of Black Lives Matter initiatives throughout Canada and the United States. Darrington urged interested members of the public to engage

1 Noushin Ziafati, "'Our story is your story': Black Loyalist Heritage Centre Reopens, Sees Increased Interest," *Chronicle Herald* (Halifax), 14 July 2020.

Susan Parker, "'Our Story is Your Story': Examining Recent Scholarship on Indigenous and Black Commemorations with a Nova Scotian Focus," *Acadiensis* 52, no. 1 (Spring/printemps 2023): 126-146.

with the untold stories of the Black Loyalists and the African diaspora, with the museum bringing them to life through the perspectives of their descendants. Elsewhere on the South Shore, the Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic collaborated with the Mi'kmaw community to create a permanent exhibit dedicated to the Mi'kmaw fisheries in 2016. The museum, opened in 1976, changed its typical depiction of settler fishers, instead making a space to present thousands of years of Mi'kmaw fishing history up to the 21st century. This was a response to the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, including a call for improved relations between museums and Indigenous peoples.[2] What these two museums exemplify are changes that have happened in individual institutions throughout Canada. An increased emphasis on decolonization, anti-racism, and diversity became central in discussions on commemoration, notably in museums, historic sites, and public spaces. From a monument standpoint, for instance, the removal of the Edward Cornwallis statue in Halifax in 2018 reflects the changes in discourse as citizens and municipalities re-evaluate celebrations of controversial colonial "heroes." Such an example demonstrates that the province's commemorative landscape is adapting to key emerging themes and systematic changes in the field of commemoration in North America. Indigenous and Black curators, museum professionals, and artists have led changes in public commemoration during the past five decades, promoting diversity and decolonizatioin in public spaces that have, in turn, elevated Indigenous and Black voices and histories and reshaped the ways in which institutions and governments approach public history.

The first major shift in the study of museums occurred in the 1980s. Two key texts, Robert Lumley's *The Museum Time Machine: Putting Cultures on Display* and Peter Vergo's *New Museology* present collections of essays that reconceptualized the museum in what became known as the "new museology."[3] New museology saw museums as aspects of their larger communities, as multifunctional institutes, and as catalysts for re-examining public history. This shift recentred museums as pillars of their communities – as institutions

2 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action: Museums and Archives, Calls 67-70," https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls_to_action_english2.pdf.

3 Robert Lumley, ed., *The Museum Time Machine: Putting Cultures on Displa*y (London: Routledge, 1988) and Peter Vergo, ed., *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989).

that were focused more on providing a space for its community rather than concentrating on its own internal collections and ideals. The "old" museology focused more on methods and theories of how to curate a museum, offering little connection to the local needs and the museum's purpose in its own region.[4] Additionally, an increased focus within academia on postcolonialism, decolonization, and anti-racism as well as women's and gender studies, subaltern studies, and memory studies helped reshape how historians viewed museums and how museums viewed themselves.[5] These emerging fields developed alongside major movements, including the civil rights movements, second-wave feminism, and Indigenous rights protests, that dramatically changed how many, if not most, people approached and viewed history. With these changes in academia and these social movements, the lack of inclusion became more evident within public history – especially in comparison to positive presentation of colonial pasts that stifled subaltern experiences. Historian and curator Ruth B. Phillips notes, for instance, that lingering influence from the Indians of Canada Pavilion from the 1967 World's Fair in Montreal, combined with Indigenous resistance to government policies such as the White Paper, forced scholars and historians to re-evaluate how museums portrayed Indigenous perspectives.[6] The pavilion and White Paper drew attention to gaps within Canadian public history addressing the relationship between Indigenous people(s) and organizations and settlers, especially when museums narrated histories exclusively from colonial perspectives instead of in partnership with Indigenous communities. Museums needed to reinvent themselves to remain relevant within society.

This shift in museology, with the resultant call for better representation, led to more in-depth critiques about elitist and colonial curation. The "new museology" critiques the Western colonial origins of museums, founded in a taxological valuation of history through objects, and raised concerns about how to ethically decolonize and repatriate museum collections.[7] Janet Marstine saw this time as a "transformation of the museum from a site of worship and

4 Vergo, *New Museology*, 3.

5 Janet Marstine, ed., *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Press, 2006), 7–17.

6 Ruth B. Phillips, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 5–11. The pavilion offered a critical overview of Indigenous history in Canada from Indigenous peoples' own perspective.

7 Sharon Macdonald, "Introduction," in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 13, 14; Vikki McCall and Clive Gray, "Museums and the "New

awe to one of discourse and critical reflection . . . committed to examining unsettling histories with sensitivity to all parties."[8] Many scholars envisioned the museum as a site to create more diverse narratives for the public to digest.[9] More importantly, however, museums become central to public history discussions on societal issues. As Tony Bennett argued in his book *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, new museology led to "the demand that there should be parity of representation for all groups and cultures within the collecting, exhibition and conservation activities of museums."[10] This also meant an increased use of community knowledge and involvement, such as through volunteer groups and advisory boards, in order to incorporate new narratives and visions into the museums.[11] With the new museology, and its increased use of oral history and community involvement as well as its push for better representation, museums became sites to help establish a new main narrative.

The growing interest in presenting more community-based and anticolonial and anti-racist stories led to another shift in museology and public history. Curators and scholars found themselves re-evaluating traditional knowledge as a key source to provide alternative versions of history. This led to oral history becoming a prominent tool to introduce subaltern narratives into museums. The increased use of oral histories promoted a new degree of collaboration between museum and community, bringing in "a shared authority," as coined by Michael Frisch, to public history.[12] The increased incorporation of oral history also offered museums a different venue to better represent diverse communities. Specifically, oral history provided a way for visitors to interact with people left out of colonial museological narratives by giving Black and Indigenous people a voice in curatorial spaces.

Museology": Theory, Practice and Organizational Change," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 29, no. 1 (2014): 17.

8 Marstine, "Introduction," in Marstine, *New Museum Theory and Practice*, 5.

9 Macdonald, "Introduction," in Macdonald and Fyfe, *Theorizing Museums*, 5.

10 Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 9.

11 An example of this is the Friends of the Museum of Industry, a volunteer group formed in the 1990s that aided museum staff with exhibit preparation and research at the Nova Scotia Museum of Industry in Stellarton, Nova Scotia. For more on this topic, see Susan Parker, "An Industrial Museum in the Heart of Tartanism: The Creation of the Nova Scotia Museum of Industry" (master's thesis, Saint Mary's University, 2018), 80–1.

12 Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 2, xvi, xxii.

As the discourse shifted within museology, physical museums themselves experienced what Lumley deemed “a renaissance” marked by renewed interest by governments in museums to enhance their cultural sectors.[13] Governments introduced policies to encourage the building and funding of museums as a way to “connect ‘people, places and collections’.”[14] Museums promote nation-building, including the establishment of heroes, events, and cultural signifiers meant to represent the ideals of the state. Consequently, the stories selected for these spaces help to convey the narratives of *who* belongs in the state’s recognized history.[15] This meant that museums also responded to national issues of public interest in their curatorial work. Ruth Phillips, for example, argues that the rise of Quebec nationalism during the latter decades of the 20th century, along with the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, influenced a push for a “two founding nations” narrative amongst museums.[16] Within Nova Scotia, museums largely focused on the stories of European settlers – particularly in the British, French/Acadian, Irish, and German settlements.[17]

Framing museums as nation-builders fueled the Canadian government’s interest in creating more such institutions, which was also sparked by the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences of 1951 and the Canadian Centennial celebrations in 1967. The commission recommended the state’s expansion of museums, while the Centennial brought funding that led to their establishment.[18] Nova Scotia experienced its own steady expansion of museums due to investment from the state as more than 30 new museums opened in the province between 1950 and 1970.[19] Funding came from both provincial and federal governments, with museums largely focused

13 Lumley, *Museum Time Machine*, 1.

14 McCall and Gray, “Museums and the “New Museology,” 22.

15 Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 18–20; Susan L.T. Ashley, ed., *Diverse Spaces: Identity, Heritage and Community in Canadian Public Culture* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 6.

16 Phillips, *Museum Pieces*, 2, 6.

17 McKay and Bates, *In the Province of History*, 9–12.

18 Jane Watts, Roland Morgan, John Fortier, and Chris Severance, “Focus on Cape Breton Museums,” *Occasional* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1973): 17–18; Sharon Babaian, *Making Do: The Early Years of the Canada Science and Technology Museum* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, n.d.), 60–4. Museums opened through use of Centennial funding include the Cape Breton’s Glace Bay Miners Museum and the LeNoir Forge Museum, Arichat, NS.

19 Nova Scotia *Museum, A Museum Development Policy for Nova Scotia*, [1973], p. 1, Museums: Nova Scotia, MG 100, vol. 194, file 226, Nova Scotia Archives (NSA), Halifax.

on British and French settlements as the funding reflected the push for nation-building narratives. This focus, however, led to limited examinations of history because of state interests that set museums as sites of influence.

Despite the changing role of museums and the calls for a more diverse presentation of history, addressing the lack of Indigenous and Black spaces within museums and throughout public commemoration is still an ongoing issue. Settler colonialism, a process in which settlers continually attempt to displace, assimilate, and erase an Indigenous population from the land, also creates a context in which local settler meseums, such as those that developed in Nova Scotia, fixated on settler – and in this case British imperial – narratives. Settler colonial narratives form the basis for several institutions and national myths of the country, creating a rhetoric drenched in white settler-centric histories and heroes.[20] Monuments, such as that of Edward Cornwallis, illustrate the heroization of settler colonial leaders within Nova Scotia. The seizing of public space through the use of place names and statues is part of the colonization process,[21] and inscribing a colonial presence to shared common spaces reinforces their power while erasing Indigenous connections to the land.[22] Cornwallis, the governor who settlers frame as the "founder" of Halifax, became a prominent name in the provincial landscape in terms of its presence on buildings and infrastructure. The celebration of Cornwallis combined imperialist-driven nationalism and attracting tourists into a "pleasant" founding myth for the city.[23]

More generally, public spaces are contentious places of public memory and often act as a tool for "erasing the country's diversity and not so harmonious past."[24] They act as reminders of *who* belongs and what parts of history seemingly matter to the state, while those not represented by the monuments

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20 Lianne McTavish, "Learning to See in New Brunswick, 1862–1929," *Canadian Historical Review* 87, no. 4 (December 2006): 554; Macdonald, "Introduction," in Macdonald and Fyfe, *Theorizing Museums*, 7; Robyn Gilliam, *Hall of Mirrors: Museums and the Canadian Public* (Saskatoon: Houghton Boston, 2001), 37; Sarah E.K. Smith and Carla Taunton, "Unsettling Canadian Heritage: Decolonial Aesthetics in Canadian Video and Performance Art," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 52, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 308.

21 Laura-Lee Kearns and Nancy Peters, "(Re)Inscribing Mi'kmaq Prescence through Public Petition, Performance and Art," in Ashley, *Diverse Spaces*, 78.

22 Andrea Bear Nicholas, "The Role of Colonial Artists in the Dispossession and Displacement of the Maliseet, 1790s–1850s," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 27; Kearns and Peters, "(Re)Inscribing Mi'kmaq Prescence," 78–82.

23 John G. Reid, "The Three Lives of Edward Cornwallis," *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society*, 16 (2013): 28–30.

24 Kearns and Peters, "(Re)Inscribing Mi'kmaq Prescence," 78.

are left out of the larger narrative.[25] And they further reframe how colonial powers seized the land, offering friendlier versions of encounters and alliances, which, in turn, becomes a method to justify settler ownership over the land and systems. Themes of settler colonialism fit into broader narratives of imperialism and racial capitalism, tending to intersect with similar concepts as slavery and anti-Blackness, including loss, violence, and erasure.[26] This is not to say that these are interchangeable terms, but rather that they overlap and reproduce themselves in the displacement of Indigenous and Black histories throughout commemorative spaces.[27] Under settler colonialism, both Indigenous and Black communities faced forced displacement and were exploited for their labour while colonists amassed wealth through the unjust acquisition of land, the extraction of resources, and the creation of hierarchies based on race. The interconnectivity between settler colonialism, imperialism, and racial capitalism continues to this day and has contributed significantly to centuries of marginalization for Black and Indigenous communities. Moreover, the arrival of Black Loyalists, Black refugees, and white settlers to the Maritimes acts as an example of the further displacement of Indigenous peoples.

There are, however, a multitude of colonial influences at work in the movement of these groups. They are people and descendants of those displaced and forced into slavery under colonial powers. Arriving in the Maritimes, the land offered to them had already witnessed the removal of Indigenous groups as well as imperial wars and the influx of settlers to lay claim to land. And this does not take into account slaves already present in the region, who faced similar dualities of experiencing displacement and forced labour before settling in the area.[28] Movement within a colonial space means dealing with interconnective layers of disruptive, racialized, and unequal structures. As

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25 Helene Vosters, *Unbecoming Nationalism: From Commemoration to Redress in Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 2019), 4.

26 Manu Vimalassery, Juliana Hu Pegues, and Alyosha Goldstein, "Introduction: On Colonial Unknowing," *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4 (October 2016): 6; Justin Leroy, "Black History in Occupied Territory: On the Entanglements of Slavery and Settler Colonialism," *Theory and Event* 19, no. 4 (October 2016): 5.

27 Racial capitalism frames capitalism as a socioeconomic structure of inequality built from the racialization and marginalization of people. As argued by Jodi Melamed, gaining capital requires inequalities that can take shape through land grabs and exploitive labour; see Melamed, "Racial Capitalism," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 76–7.

28 Harvey Amani Whitfield, "White Archives, Black Fragments: Problems and Possibilities in Telling the Lives of Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes," *Canadian Historical Review* 101, no. 3 (September 2020): 324–6.

Black people built homes and communities in Nova Scotia, they still faced unequal status in provincial society. In turn, mainstream commemoration focused on those who held substantial power within a system designed to uphold racial hierarchies and erase Indigenous presence.

Erasure within Nova Scotia can easily be found within the provincial museums, and includes newer museums and exhibits. The Nova Scotia Museum of Industry, the largest museum in the province in terms of storage and exhibit space, offers one such example. Opened in 1994, the museum focuses on depictions of 19th-century British settlers partaking in ship building, tanning, and coal mining before moving onto factory work, farming, and tourism.[29] A cut-out of a generic Black textile factory worker, added three years after the museum's opening, offers the only representation that counters the white settler workers in the museum. No Indigenous representations exist within the permanent galleries. Essentially, the galleries erased the industrial history of Indigenous and Black labourers as if they did not exist despite their participation in the majority of the industries included in the museum. Historian John S. Lutz argues that Indigenous peoples, in particular, "have not vanished from the historical landscape: they have *been vanished*."[30] Their histories are there, but the museums chose not to include it in its permanent exhibits. Instead, museums wishing to include Indigenous and Black histories tend to rely on temporary exhibits to expand the narrative. These exhibits do not offer long-term solutions, as they often only remain in the museum for a matter of months and often reference only one event or person instead of highlighting continuous Indigenous and Black existence throughout history.[31] They further set a precedent for what the museum deems as a priority for its

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29 As of 2022, the museum had made no additions to its permanent galleries in the past five years besides adding a section dedicated to the Clairtone factory that was once located in Stellarton; this Clairtone section replaced panels dedicated to unions and labour movements. However, there is far more diversity amongst their temporary exhibits, including a travelling exhibit on hockey from the Canadian Museum of History that discusses the game's Mi'kmaw origins and diversity amongst professional players.

30 Quoted in Fred Burrill, "The Settler Order Framework: Rethinking Canadian Working-Class History," *Labour/Le Travail* 83 (Spring 2019): 177.

31 Examples of temporary exhibits can be found throughout the Nova Scotia Museum network of museums, where there is often little or no representation of Indigenous or Black histories. The Museum of Industry, for instance, displayed panels on Black Nova Scotians, on loan from the Black Cultural Centre, for a few months in its lobby in 2017. McCulloch House Museum in Pictou ran an exhibit in the summer of 2022 on the Black Battalion. And the Nova Scotia Museum also ran an exhibit in 2017 for the celebration of its 150th anniversary that highlighted important Nova Scotians and included Mi'kmaw and Black biographies. The exhibit travelled between the museums in the network as a temporary exhibit during the year.

historical presentation. Temporary exhibits can offer new perspectives, but they also become a method for museums to avoid systematic changes within their collections. David Newhouse argues, for instance, that Indigenous peoples are "hidden in plain sight."[32] The histories of Indigenous and Black communities fit into the theme and timeline of these museums, but these histories remain hidden in favour of colonial depictions. Despite knowing that these histories exist, museums left them out of their main narratives in favour of permanent exhibits that highlight the successes of the settlers.

By the end of the 20th century, public history institutions such as museums and art galleries were attempting to address ways to diversify and decolonize in an effort to counter anti-Blackness and colonial lenses. This came as many curators and institutions tried to excuse their own role in settler colonialism or racism.[33] Joana Joachim maintains, for example, that often Black professionals (including curators and historians) are asked to guest curate or set up a temporary exhibit as a show of solidarity with the community.[34] This provides a quick, one-time show of support without making critical examinations of the operations or the materials on permanent display. Joachim adds that this leads to fewer permanent positions for Black professionals at museums across Canada, which only impedes proper examination of Black artifacts and art.[35] Such temporary solutions allow museums to address shortages in their exhibits but fail to enact changes to policies or changes to the curated colonial narratives that comprise the permanent exhibits. The tendency towards short-term fixes illustrates what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang see as "settler moves to innocence." This concept critiques ways in which settlers find relief against calls of decolonization, relieving them "of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all." Tuck and Yang also use the concept to explore how settlers excuse themselves from criticism by claiming Indigenous ancestry or seeking belonging within Indigenous communities as well as educational and anti-capitalism movements that place Indigenous peoples on the margins

32 Quoted in Kearns and Peters, "(Re)Inscribing Mi'kmaq Presence," 76.

33 Eve Tuck, and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (September 2012): 10.

34 Joana Joachim, "Curating, Criticism and Care, or, 'Showing Up' as Praxis," *C Magazine* 145 (Spring 2020): 1.

35 Joachim, "Curating, Criticism and Care, or 'Showing Up' as Praxis," 1.

or completely erase their history and ties to the land.[36] These moves do little in terms of helping to achieve decolonization. Instead, they act as way to circumnavigate addressing settler colonialism. By failing to fundamentally change policies and exhibits that marginalized or erase Indigenous and Black communities, museums continue to uphold settler colonialism.

Some methods, however, have emerged within the evolving scholarship and curatorship that provide the means to counter settler colonialism within commemoration. In the case of museums, collaborating with community partners and Indigenous and Black curators helps to elevate these perspectives within the museums. This includes hiring curators and historians to work with the museum staff, as well as working with organizations and community members (including artists) to help design and design the historical presentations. As Heather Igloliorte argues in her article "Curating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit," it is not just adding space for these voices but also including curators, artists, historians, and community members in order to fully grasp their experiences and worldviews.[37] Igloliorte's curation of a new Inuit art collection at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec offers an example. The exhibit used Inuit *qaujimajatuqangit* (traditional knowledge), which places the pieces of art within an Inuit worldview and lens. This worldview primarily concentrates around themes of learning, collectiveness, community, resourcefulness, and resilience with an overall emphasis on the relationships to one another (including the land). This stands in rather stark contrast to how Inuit art is often assessed by non-Inuit curators and historians, which leaves gaps in its meaning and importance to its community.[38] By utilizing Igloliorte's knowledge as well as Inuit *qaujimajatuqangit*, the artifacts and the exhibit exemplify an Inuit voice and perspective that effectively exhibits the items within the context of the creators and their culture. Similarly, the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian brought in Indigenous peoples, including curators and historians, in order to create accurate and properly representative galleries. Jolene Rickard notes how the extensive collection disrupts the colonial landscape of Washington, DC, with

36 Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," 10–23. Tuck and Yang include the Occupy movement as an example. The movement called out inequalities and often promoting concepts related to wealth redistribution. This often overlooked, however, that wealth is tied to land, pushing aside the Indigenous claims to the land.

37 Heather Igloliote, "Curating Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit*: Inuit Knowledge in the Qallunaat Art Museum," *ArtJournal* 76, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 101–2.

38 Igloliote, "Curating Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit*," 101–5.

exhibits created from a blend of experiences of what it meant to be Indigenous in the United States.[39] Similar to Joachim's argument that Black curators and historians understand the deeper context behind Black art,[40] Igloliorte and Rickard's analyses (and Igloliorte's curation) underline the need for Indigenous permanent exhibitions curated by their own community.

Engaging in public commemoration provides another way to counter the colonial lens. Susan L.T. Ashley argues that the nature of public art and commemoration allows for discourse between the audience and the marginalized, forcing communities to recognize the hidden layers of history in these spaces.[41] It further allows control over their own stories in these spaces and how they present their culture to the public. Julie Nagam offers an example of reclamation and commentary using work by Jeff Thomas, a Haudenosaunee artist, to highlight the erasure of Indigenous spaces in Toronto. Thomas used a stereotypical figurine of a Plains Indian against modern industrial landscapes, immediately tying the past to the present while bringing attention to the belief that Indigenous peoples of figures of the past.[42] Another example is Thomas's photograph *Buffalo Dancer at Bathurst Street Bridge*, which not only highlights the forgotten Anishinaabeg warriors who fought in the War of 1812 but also illustrates the importance of the Garrison Creek to the traditional water routes around Lake Ontario.[43] For settlers, the site is largely remembered for Fort York and the bridge. Thomas's art reflects landscapes in which Indigenous (and often Black) existence is erased, hidden by the settler city that sprung up in their place. Returning their voices to the spaces, however, reasserts their continuous presence in the history of these places and acts as a catalyst to inspire further commemorative actions.

Artist and curator Camille Turner's creation of the Afronautic Research Lab in 2016, for instance, helps to recover Black history and re-establish Black presence. Examining archival documents, the project draws attention to Canada's links to slavery. Her work in Newfoundland and Labrador,

39 Jolene Rickard, "Absorbing or Obscuring the Absence of a Critical Space in the Americas for Indigeneity: The Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* no. 52 (Autumn 2007): 85–7.

40 Joachim, "Curating, Criticism and Care, or, 'Showing Up' as Praxis," 2.

41 Ashley, *Diverse Spaces*, 4–5.

42 Julie Nagam, "Mapping Stories of Place: An Alternative Cartography Through the Visual Narrative of Jeff Thomas," in Ashley, *Diverse Spaces*, 190.

43 Nagam, "Mapping Stories of Place," 196–7.

for instance, draws attention to ships built in the region to carry slaves.[44] Another good illustration of recovering Black history and re-establishing Black presence are the analyses of the urban redevelopment projects in the 1960s throughout Canada that targeted Black communities as sites for their infrastructure projects. For many communities, this meant expropriation and destroyed neighbourhoods. The community of Africville, for example, faced years of encroachment from the city of Halifax. The city built industrial sites around the neighbourhood, including railroads, factories, and a dump. When the city wanted the land as a potential site for industrial and infrastructure projects, city workers razed Africville and forced its residents to relocate. City officials justified their decision by declaring their concern for the adverse living conditions facing its residents.[45] Similar stories echoed through other Black neighbourhoods across Canada, including Montreal's Little Burgundy. The city demolished houses throughout the community to make way for a highway extension.[46] The destruction of these communities displaced residents, removing their presence in parts of the cities.

To help counter the loss of Black spaces, Camille Turner created HUSH HARBOUR – a name that references safe spaces created by enslaved people where they could socialize.[47] The audio walk combines history and fiction, creating an Afrofuturistic experience as it guides guests through a journey based on true stories. Afrofuturism reimagines Black futures and stories outside of slavery, focusing on excellence and often futuristic themes.[48] Robyn Maynard describes it as a way to "reconceive black existence beyond the violent imposition and sorting of the world population into (non) human/human." Instead, artists utilize futurism to create their own stories and mythology outside of colonial histories.[49] Kearns and Peters expressed a similar concept

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44 Camille Turner, "Afronautic Research Lab," *Camille Turner*, 2016, https://www.camilleturner.com/afronautic-research-lab

45 Tina Loo, "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada," *Acadiensis* 39, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2010): 31.

46 David Eng, "Advertising Feature: The Story of Jazz in Little Burgundy," Montreal Gazette 8 July 2013, https://montrealgazette.com/arts/festival%20central/the-story-of-jazz-in-little-burgundy.

47 Camille Turner, "Evoking a Site of Memory: An Afrofuturist Sonic Walk that Maps Historic Toronto's Black Geographies," *FES Outstanding Graduate Student Paper Series* 18, no. 5 (January 2012): 39–46.

48 Paul Younguist, *A Pure Solar World: Sun Ra and the Birth of Afrofuturism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 3.

49 Robyn Maynard, "Reading Black Resistance through Afrofuturism: Notes on Post-Apocalyptic Blackness and Black Rebel Cyborgs in Canada," *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 39 (Spring 2018): 32–3.

for Indigenous commemoration, noting that often when Indigenous people(s) are included in exhibits and public art their stories are tied into suffering and violence.[50] Recent exhibits and art, however, help to transcend this tendency by introducing stories of hope. The Halifax North Library, for example, hosted an exhibit in 2018 titled "Afrofuturism: Embracing a New African Nova Scotian Perspective." Featuring local artwork, the exhibit aimed to promote alternative narratives of Black history.[51] Public history and commemoration thus become avenues to recapture and reclaim space for marginalized groups, while offering a chance for historians and artists to express ideas that highlight success and innovation.

In Nova Scotia, the reclamation of public space – or rather the reminder of Black and Indigenous voices in these spaces – occurs in varying degrees. Movements such as Black Lives Matter and Idle No More brought attention to discrimination and erasure, and organizers of commemorative sites in the province became increasingly aware of their own role in historical gaps. The following paragraphs highlight progress with the reclamation of space and the expansion of narratives at some sites in Nova Scotia. It is not meant as a complete list of monuments, historic sites, and exhibits. Rather, the examples give insight to important contributions, shifts, and groups within Nova Scotia that have helped signal changes in the mindsets of governmental institutions.

The national and international scholarship that arose in response to social and political movements during the 20th century addressed issues within public history and representation. Nova Scotia was no exception to this trend, as public commemoration within Nova Scotia responded to movements that similarly influenced scholarship. Ian McKay noted this transition within the Nova Scotia Archives (NSA) from the 1960s onwards, following the influence of civil rights movements on public and academic discourse.[52] The intense focus on British imperialism and European settlers at the archives shifted to include histories dedicated to women and Black Canadians. While the NSA offers one of the earlier examples of a drastic switch in commemorative approach within the province, the growth of celebration of Black heritage continued to thrive throughout the 20th century. The year 1977 brought the incorporation

50 Kearns and Peters, "(Re)Inscribing Mi'kmaq Presence," 83.

51 Kim Caine, "Afrofuturism: Embracing a New African Nova Scotian Perspective (Halifax)," *African Nova Scotian Affairs*, 2018, https://ansa.novascotia.ca/calendar/event/afrofutursm-embracing-new-african-nova-scotian-perspective-halifax.

52 Ian McKay, "Race, White Settler Liberalism, and the Nova Scotia Archives, 1931-1976," *Acadiensis* 49, no. 2 (Autumn/automne 2020): 7-8.

of the Society for the Protection and Preservation of Black Culture in Nova Scotia (renamed later to the Black Cultural Society of Nova Scotia). The society opened the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia six years later.[53] Since then, the centre has had a key role in the presenting and preserving the region's Black history. Their efforts, especially from member Calvin Ruck, led to national recognition for the No. 2 Construction Battalion (also known as the Black Battalion) in 1992.[54] The following year, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada created a monument dedicated to the Black Battalion along the Pictou waterfront. The 1980s and 1990s also brought further recognition for Black stories within the province. On the South Shore, the Black Loyalist Heritage Society successfully applied for a national plaque to mark the Black Burial Ground, part of the society's Heritage Trail. This trail includes archaeological sites connected to Black Loyalists and passes by a replica pit house and interpretative panels.[55] Similarly, on the North Shore, community members in the New Glasgow area opened the Africentric Heritage Park in 1990. The park presents monuments and interpretative panels detailing the history of the community. Glenda Jones, member of the park's committee, described it as "the story of how we came here and where we're heading."[56] These monuments and parks return Black narratives to the land, providing community access to rich displays while showcasing memorials and stories of their centuries-old presence in the space.

The late 20th century saw the installation of more diverse historical narratives and representation throughout Nova Scotia. For Indigenous history, the Mi'kmaw experienced the start of more acknowledgement within museums. At a provincial government level, the Nova Scotia Museum hired historian and ethnologist Ruth Holmes Whitehead as an assistant curator. Whitehead provided a Mi'kmaw voice to the system's staff and a knowledgeable insider perspective to the collections. And the Museum of Natural History, part of the Nova Scotia Museum, created an ethnology gallery that contained

53 Calvin Ruck, *The Black Battalion, 1916-1920: Canada's Best Kept Military Secret* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing 1987), 30.

54 Ruck, *Black Battalion*, 30-41; Kevin Cox, "Calvin Ruck, Activist and Senator 1929-2004," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 23 October 2004.

55 Nova Scotia Tourism, "Black Loyalist Heritage Trail," https://www.novascotia.com/see-do/trails/black-loyalist-heritage-trail/6094; Black Loyalist Heritage Centre, "Visit us," https://blackloyalist.novascotia.ca/visit-us.

56 Amanda Jess, "Second Interpretive Panel in Works for Africentric Heritage Park," *The News* (New Glasgow), 20 August 2014.

collections dedicated to Mi'kmaw history and artistry.[57] This became a first for any museum within the Nova Scotia Museum system and set the tone for future exhibits at the Museum of Natural History. Although several of the museums both outside and within Nova Scotia Museum's network continued to showcase colonial-themed exhibits, the Museum of Natural History became a catalyst for change and collaboration in the 21st century.

The erasure and displacement of Indigenous and Black histories from museum galleries is widespread throughout the Maritimes. The roots established by community-based groups and the Nova Scotia Museum's network of sites, however, led to greater collaboration and representation in the 21st century. The narratives presented within museums also became a focus of the provincial government in Nova Scotia in the 2000s. Studying the heritage presentations throughout the province, the government released a report in 2008 that encourage more engagement with museums to develop diverse exhibits.[58] In particular, the government identified a need for more Mi'kmaw, Gaelic, Acadian, and Black representation throughout heritage sites in the province. This led to a re-evaluation of history presented within the Nova Scotia Museum system and their own report and master plan was released in 2009. Surveying each of their sites, their report found an emphasis on Loyalist narratives amongst their exhibits along with 19th-century immigration. Meanwhile, only the Museum of Natural History offered Mi'kmaw history, and the Ross-Thomson House and Store Museum in Shelburne offered a small exhibit about Black history in its region.[59] The Nova Scotia Museum finished the report by introducing a plan to expand Mi'kmaw and Black narratives throughout its museums.

This call-to-action from the Nova Scotia Museum's plan set a tone for its role within the province's public history sphere. Since 2009, the Nova Scotia Museum has instituted major changes to its key sites, including new exhibits, collaborations, and a new museum. One of the first changes came to the permanent exhibits at the Museum of Natural History. In 2011, the museum opened "*Netukulim*k," an exhibit exploring the plants and creatures of Nova

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57 The Nova Scotia Museum is a network of 28 separate museums across the province and is part of the provincial government.

58 Nova Scotia Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage, *A Treasured Past, A Previous Future: A Heritage Strategy for Nova Scotia 2008-2013*, https://cch.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/inline/documents/heritagestrategy.pdf.

59 Nova Scotia Museum, *Interpretive Master Plan*, https://museum.novascotia.ca/about-nsm/interpretive-master-plan.

Scotia's forests.[60] The area also includes art and history from the "This is What I Wish You Knew" exhibit, a collaboration with the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre following the release of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.[61] Located at the front of the museum, these two exhibits are visitors' first experience of the space, placing Mi'kmaw history at the forefront. Similarly, the Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic in Lunenburg places Mi'kmaw fisheries in a prominent position with its exhibit "First Fishers." Opened in October 2016, the First Fishers exhibit presents the history of fisheries in Mi'kma'ki. It represents a large collaborative effort between the museum staff, heritage professionals, and communities, including the Nova Scotia Museum's Mi'kmaq Cultural Heritage Curator Roger Lewis and the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources in Cape Breton.[62] Covering thousands of years of fishing history, it ranges from early tools and methods to the impact of settler colonialism, displacement, the Donald Marshall decision, and the extent of modern fisheries. By including recent issues and artifacts, the exhibit also helps to counter the common tendency to relegate Indigenous peoples to a distance past.[63] And the exhibit further combats the tendency towards a settler colonial lens to history by immediately establishing the Mi'kmaq as the first fishers and examining the history of their fisheries. While the Fisheries Museum and the Museum of Natural History offer permanent exhibits, a temporary exhibit at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax offers another collaborative effort from within the Nova Scotia Museum network. Entitled "*Ta'n me'j Tel'keknuo'ltiek*: How Unique We Still Are," guest curator Salina Kemp created an exhibit to showcase Mi'kmaw culture of the past and present while providing representation that is often non-existent within museums and schools.[64] The exhibit focuses on connections to the land and sea, while including English, French, and Mi'kmaw texts. All of these exhibits act as bridges between the Mi'kmaw community and institutions that typical focus on settler perspectives.

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60 Museum of Natural History, *"Netukulimk,"* https://naturalhistory.novascotia.ca/what-see-do/permanent-exhibits/netukulimk.

61 Museum of Natural History, "This is What I Wish You Knew," https://naturalhistory.novascotia.ca/what-see-do/what-i-wish-you-knew.

62 Grant Murray Design, "First Fishers," https://www.grantmurraydesign.ca/first-fishers.

63 Smith and Taunton, "Unsettling Canadian Heritage," 307.

64 Angel Moore, "New exhibit *Ta'n Me'j Tel-Keknuo'ltiek* Opens at Maritime Museum in Halifax," https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/tan-mej-tel-keknuoltiek-exhibit-maritime-museum-halifax/.

In conjunction with the increased representation of Indigenous history, the creation of museum spaces dedicated to Black history is rapidly expanding throughout the Maritimes. The Black Loyalist Heritage Centre in Birchtown, already mentioned above, is a prime example. Opened in partnership with the Black Loyalist Heritage Society in 2015, the museum and society are led by Black professionals with experience in law and history and the museum is part of the Nova Scotia Museum system.[65] Besides a walking trail, the museum focuses on Black Loyalists and the African Diaspora – the first of its kind within the Nova Scotia Museum network. The centre provides a source for the public and community to learn about the Black past while also acting as an archival resource for the society. As quoted in the opening paragraph of this article, Cynthia Dorrington's words of "our story is your story"[66] reflects the importance of these hidden pasts left out of the larger, provincial narratives. Black and Indigenous histories are part of Nova Scotia's history, permanently intwined with the historical landscape. Reinserting their voices within public spaces is important in helping to preserve all the layers of the province's history.

Besides the changes at the Nova Scotia Museum, federal historic sites expanded their collections during the second decade of the 21st century. The changes occurred primarily following the release of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the rise of recent anti-racism and diversity movements (including Black Lives Matters). These federal historic forts found themselves reworking their presentations of colonial wars as they moved away from narratives that offered only the settler perspective. At the Fortress of Louisbourg, for instance, this took the shape of enlarging their section dedicated to Mi'kmaw history. Working with the Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn Negotiation Office (Mi'kmaq Rights Initiative), the fortress opened the Mi'kmaw Interpretive Centre.[67] Parks Canada also hired Mi'kmaw interpreters, who wore traditional 18th-century clothing while working.[68] Fort Anne in Annapolis Royal and the Halifax Citadel worked with Mi'kmaw groups and artists to create new exhibits that detailed Mi'kmaw use of the land

65 Black Loyalist Heritage Society, "What to See & Do," https://blackloyalist.com/.

66 *Chronicle Herald*, 14 July 2020.

67 Parks Canada, "Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site Opens New Mi'kmaw Interpretive Centre," https://www.canada.ca/en/parks-canada/news/2017/09/fortress_of_louisbourgnationalhistoricsiteopensnewmikmawinterpre.html. The centre includes interpretive panels, historically dressed storytellers, and daily demonstrations of dancing and drumming.

68 Yvonne LeBlanc-Smith, "Replica of Mi'kmaq Dress First of its Type Worn at Fortress of Louisbourg since 1700s," https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/mi-kmaq-dress-fortress-louisbourg-1700s-1.4714913.

and their histories.[69] The Citadel's contribution also includes discussions on the Black Loyalists, and profiles of Mi'kmaw and Black veterans (such as members of the No. 2 Construction Battalion). Other recent improvements at the federal level came from the Historic Sites and Monuments Board in 2022. In July, the board unveiled a new plaque to commemorate the No. 2 Construction Battalion and updated an adjacent interpretive panel concerning the battalion's history and members. This formed part of a week of events leading up to the national apology to the battalion, together with a new exhibit at the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia.[70] The board unveiled another new plaque for Viola Desmond in August of 2022 at the former Roseland Theatre in New Glasgow. This plaque highlighted the activism spurred from Desmond's resilience to discrimination at the theatre in 1946.[71] And the board had originally designated Desmond a national historic person in 2017 prior to Desmond's placement on the $10 bank note in 2018. These exhibits and plaques show improvements in cooperation between Parks Canada and the local communities, while addressing the one-sided settler narratives. They offer more than one layer of the historical narrative of these spaces, reminding visitors and the public of the continuous presence of Black and Mi'kmaw experiences.

Yet while the federal and provincial governments have found ways to incorporate more diversity into their institutions and into public spaces, these inclusions often came as responses to criticism. Whether influenced by larger movements or internal reports, it is the grassroots movements along with institutions, groups, and artists that laid the groundworks for improvement. Their work brought about new public commemorations in the province in the 2000s. These public commemorations helped return Indigenous and Black histories and narratives to Nova Scotia's landscapes. The incorporation of the Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre in 2001 led to a heritage woods trail with panels dedicated to local stories. The nearby Millbrook Cultural and Heritage

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69 Victoria Welland, "New Mural at N.S. Historic Site Honours Mi'kmaw Legend, Way of Life," https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/new-mural-at-n-s-historic-site-honours-mi-kmaw-legend-way-of-life-1.6556762; Parks Canada, "Government of Canada Announces Completion of $5M Signature Exhibit at Halifax Citadel National Historic Site," https://www.canada.ca/en/parks-canada/news/2022/04/government-of-canada-announces-completion-of-5m-signature-exhibit-at-halifax-citadel-national-historic-site.html.

70 "Prime Minister Apologizes for Anti-Black Racism Experienced by No. 2 Construction Battalion," https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/canadian-government-apologizes-to-relatives-of-no-2-construction-battalion-1.6513861.

71 Parks Canada, "Viola Desmond Nation Historic Person (1914–1965)," https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/culture/clmhc-hsmbc/res/information-backgrounder/Viola_Desmond.

Centre opened its own interpretive centre in 2006 (then named the Glooscap Cultural and Heritage Centre), creating a hub for cultural workshops and history. A large monument of Glooscap alongside the provincial highway by the building further reminds travellers of the continuous Mi'kmaw presence in the region. Outdoor interpretive panels further enhanced the downtown landscape of New Glasgow, which highlighted Black history in the community (especially Viola Desmond). The panels came as the result of work by the town's heritage committee and the New Glasgow Black Gala Homecoming. After a push from the African Nova Scotia community, the town also renamed a street in the area "Viola's Way." The street passes the former Roseland Theatre, where the national plaque is located.[72] These examples show the growth of visible reminders of Mi'kmaw and Black history while providing the communities opportunities to present their own stories years before updates to most federal and provincial sites.

The reclamation of public space at a community level continued to expand during the 2010s. In particular, the province saw an expansion of art projects as forms of inclusion. As argued by Susan L.T. Ashley, Laura-Lee Kearns, and Nancy Peters, public art is an important tool of reclamation, resilience, and visibility by reminding audiences of histories often repressed and erased from the landscape. A mural depicting George Dixon outside of the Africville Museum, for instance, helps to bring attention to former Africville residents' histories.[73] A world-champion boxer and the creator of shadowboxing, Dixon's mural celebrates a major success story for the community. The museum itself opened in 2011 after a formal apology from the city and the establishment of the Africville Heritage Trust. Director Juanita Peters noted the importance of murals to remind the public of the past and to make them aware of important figures that make up the province's Black history.[74] The Dixon mural shows how art acts as a visual reminder of the past that allows for public thought and commentary. Murals provide access for communities and artists, repurposing space into a method of addressing representation.

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72 *Pictou Advocate*, 17 August 2022. In recent years, the town faced criticism after not consulting the community after allowing a restaurant to use the street as a summer patio. An art installation depicting Desmond funded by the current owners of the former theatre's building further failed to consult the community, instead using the art to better their image – another example of the "settler move to innocence."

73 Emma Davie, "Mural of Africville's George Dixon to Mark Boxing Champion's 150th birthday," https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/george-dixon-boxing-champion-mural-africville-1.5650845.

74 Davie, "Mural of Africville's George Dixon."

Art pieces that challenge colonial narratives can be found in highly colonized spaces, whether that be along city streets bearing the names derived from colonial powers or amongst churches and government-owned buildings. Kearns and Peters note the importance of Alan Syliboy's "Dream Canoe" as a representation of Indigenous peoples in the present. Located in the People's Place Library in Antigonish, the town commissioned the painting to ensure that everyone felt included inside the building.[75] Syliboy created additional pieces for Pictou United Church's Spirit Glen Contemplative Garden. The paintings depict a caribou, an eagle, and a whale, referencing spirit guides in different areas of the earth (ocean, land, and sky). Syliboy's distinctive art references older Mi'kmaw drawings and petroglyphs, incorporating oral history to keep tradition alive in new forms of art.[76] These pieces of public art help bring back an Indigenous voice to the land, especially in two northern Nova Scotian towns that primarily focus on the narratives of Scottish settlers. These installations show a positive shift in public commemoration trends both on a state level and amongst the local community members.

Up until the mid-20th century, commemoration, museums, and public art throughout Canada tended to focus on settler colonial timelines, histories, and myths. The sites become nation-builders driven to tell a selection of history instead of the multitude of experiences. Since the 1960s, however, a shift has occurred that has brought more Indigenous and Black professionals, art, and histories into the galleries of museums and in public spaces. Scholarship focusing on these evolving commemorations examines the spaces and issues and provides ways forward to help provoke further change within institutions. This shift away from the predominant settler-only narratives through the hiring of Indigenous and Black professionals, opening new exhibits and museums, and the reclamation of space including parks, streets, and buildings demonstrates that meaningful progress has taken place within the province's historical discourse – an historical discourse now driven largely by the communities they represent.

75 Kearns and Peters, "(Re)Inscribing Mi'kmaq Presence," 77, 83.

76 Angel Moore, "Mi'kmaw Youth Paint Petroglyphs on Boat with Artist Alan Syliboy," https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/mikmaw-youth-paint-petroglyphs-on-boat-with-artist-alan-syliboy/; Gayle Wilson, "Mi'kmaq Artist Alan Syliboy Hopes Church Panels will Take Visitors 'On New Journeys of Mind and Soul'," https://lighthousenow.ca/article.php?title=Mi_kmaq_artist_Alan_Syliboy_hopes_church_panels_wi.

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