SLAVERY, RACE AND HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CASE OF DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

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On 5 September 2019, Teri Balser, interim president of Dalhousie University, at the launch of the *Report on Lord Dalhousie's History on Slavery and Race*,[1] made a historic apology to the Black community in Nova Scotia.

> "Today, on behalf of Dalhousie University, I apologize to the People of African Descent in our community. We regret the actions and views of George Ramsay, the ninth Earl of Dalhousie, and the consequences and impact they have had in our collective history as a university, as a province, and as a region. Further, we acknowledge our dual responsibility to address the legacies of anti-Black racism and slavery, while continuing to stand against anti-Black racism today." [2]

What inspired such a robust apology? In the fall of 2016, Dalhousie University began its examination of the university and its founder, Lord Dalhousie's views on slavery and race, with specific regard to how these impacted the Black community. The examination was prompted by a slew of negative incidents at the university, and within the province of Nova Scotia itself that targeted Black people.[3] The newly-formed Black Faculty and Staff Caucus met with President Richard Florizone and Chair of the Senate Kevin Hewitt, to discuss the anti-Black racism that seemed to have become a hallmark of university life. For this purpose a scholarly panel was commissioned, and I was tasked by the university administration with chairing the panel, and leading the research effort that it would entail. Thus began a 3-year journey that would take me and other researchers to archives in the UK, and Canada. The story that we unearthed revealed Dalhousie University and the Lord Dalhousie's imbrication with transatlantic slavery, and concomitantly anti-Blackness. The research produced the *Report*.

From the research I discerned five distinct areas of the uni-

1 For a full rendition of the report see, www.dal.ca/dept/ldp/findings.html

2 Matt Reeder, "Forging a Path Forward: Dal Receives Lord Dalhousie Panel Report," *Dal News*, 6 Sept. 2019. www.dal.ca/news/2019/09/06/forging-a-path-forward--dal-receives-and-welcomes-lord-dalhousie.html

See also, Taryn Grant, "Dalhousie University apologizes for historical ties to racism, slavery," The Star, 5 Dept. 2019. www.thestar.com/halifax/2019/09/05/dalhousie-university-apologizes-for-historical-ties-to-racism-slavery.html

3 Aly Thomson, CTV News, "Group in Nova Scotia wants Confederate flag banned across Canada," 29 July 2015.

versity and its founder's relationship to race, slavery, and anti-Black racism.

THE BLACK REFUGEES OF THE WAR OF 1812

Lord Dalhousie arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in October 1816, to assume his new appointment as lieutenant-governor of the province. Dalhousie's arrival coincided with the settlement of the Black Refugees of the War of 1812. Between 1813 and 1816, upwards of 3000 of these individuals arrived from the Southern United States. Former slaves, the Black Refugees gained their freedom by fleeing to British lines during the war, and supporting the British Crown in its fight against the United States in the newly-ended war. The Refugees were promised land, seeds, foodstuff, and other materials necessarily to begin a new life on the frontier.

Upon arrival in Nova Scotia, the Black Refugees soon realized that the support promised by the British was not forthcoming in its totality. For one, Lord Dalhousie felt that Black people, especially former slaves, were not the kind of settlers that Nova Scotia needed. He saw Nova Scotia as a "white man's country" and therefore wished for and encouraged White settlers to make Nova Scotia their home. Sherbrooke, his predecessor, and the Nova Scotia Assembly also held the same opinion, as did many members of the province's citizenry. Thus, the Black Refugees entered a hostile environment, in racism against them was palpable.

Dalhousie's treatment of the Refugees was dismal. He settled them on small plots of "the worst kind of land" in segregated communities. Land size varied from 8 to 10 acres; this was insufficient for the Refugees to become independent farmers. By contrast, White Settlers were accorded 100 acres or more of arable land. Furthermore, by June 1817, less than a year after his arrival in the colony, going back on the promise of food supply, Dalhousie cut the rations of the Refugees by half, even as he himself felt that they would starve with such limited food supply. Dalhousie's other anti-Black-Refugee strategy hinged on deportation out of the province. He wanted to send them back to their former slave masters in the United States! When that failed, Dalhousie insisted that they be sent to the island of Trinidad (still a slave colony), or to the settlement of Sierra Leone.

In December 1816, Dalhousie penned a letter to his superior at Whitehall, Lord Bathurst. In the letter the lieutenant-governor expressed his views that the Black Refugees were not worthy settlers, and this was caused, he believed, by their former slave status and their supposed racial inferiority. The most offending section of the letter notes that the Refugees were:

> *Slaves by habit & education, no longer working under the dread of the lash, their idea of freedom is idleness and they are therefore quite incapable of industry.*[4]

The practices, policies, and views of Dalhousie toward the Black Refugees and Black Nova Scotians, as a whole, led to the marginalizaton of African Nova Scotians in almost every aspect of their lives.[5]

DALHOUSIE'S MARTINIQUE PRO-SLAVERY EXPERIENCE DURING THE FRANCO-BRITISH WARS

In 1794, the British army invaded Martinique on the invitation of Royalist French Planters who were incensed that the abolitionist-minded Republican revolutionary government had abolished slavery on the island. Dalhousie led several of the invading regiments and helped the British claim victory. In return, he was appointed governor of the island, where he re-established slavery.

Martinique was a slave colony in which the major economic activity was sugar cane cultivation. Thus Dalhousie witnessed enslaved Africans working under the lash, or the dread of it. Was it in Martinique that he began subscribing to the notion that Black people were "slaves by habit and education?" It was during his Martinican experience that the earl had his first concrete encounter with a Black community, and further, this experience of conquest and re-enslavement likely influenced his subsequent views about African peoples. Two decades later in Nova Scotia, Dalhousie would express the white supremacist logic that Blacks were naturally suited for slavery.

THE WEST INDIA TRADE

During the period of Caribbean slavery, the Nova Scotian economy was heavily dependent on the West India trade, which was premised on slave labour. Halifax merchants traded salted fish, beef, pork, timber, flour, staves, horses, and other goods to West Indian slave plantations in exchange for slave-made rum, sugar, molasses, cocoa, coffee and other products. Once these slave-made products arrived in Nova Scotia, they were sold within the province, itself, or re-exported to other parts of British North America, and around the

4 Letter from Dalhousie to Bathurst, 29 Dec. 1816, Nova Scotia Archives, RG1, vol. 112, 6-9.

5 Laura Fraser, "Halifax police chief apologizes for street checks and historic 'mistreatment' of www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/halifax-police-chief-apology-street-checks-black-males-1.5376868

globe. Halifax merchants, some with connections to Dalhousie University, grew wealthy from this commerce. The West India trade was, thus, a mainstay of the economies of Nova Scotia, and the broader Atlantic Region. It also fostered shipbuilding, banking, and insurance, which led to further infrastructural development of the region.

Revenues from the West India trade flowed into the provincial treasury from customs duties, on the slave-grown products. These revenues not only funded provincial infrastructure but they also funded the construction of Dalhousie University (originally called Dalhousie College) and provided an endowment that contributed to the salaries of its teaching staff. Coupled with this was the Castine Fund, a source which provided the original endowment for Dalhousie University. This Fund was derived from customs duties collected on West Indian slave-produced goods, during Britain's occupation of Castine, Maine in the War of 1812.

As the lieutenant-governor of the province, Lord Dalhousie was empowered by Lord Bathurst to use the money from the Castine fund to help in the settlement of settlers, which included the Black Refugees. Dalhousie could therefore have used the Castine fund to provide the Refugees with sufficient food to ward off starvation.[6] Instead, he used the money to establish the school, which bore his name. West Indian slave money helped to found Dalhousie University, yet given the racist nature of Nova Scotian society, Black people would not have access to this institution for a very long time. Further connection of the university to the West India trade is that the official residence of Dalhousie's president was once owned by Levi Hart, himself a West India merchant.

WEST INDIAN SLAVE COMPENSATION MONEY

The fourth web of Dalhousie's involvement with slavery had to do with the compensation money the British government awarded to former West Indian slave owners at the end of slavery in the Caribbean in 1833. At least two important Halifax families – the Almons and the Johnstons – which were connected by marriage, were awardees of slave compensation monies paid out by the British government to slave masters, their agents or trustees, for the loss of their slave property as a result of the abolition of Caribbean slavery.[7]

ACTIVE SUPPORT OF THE CONFEDERACY BY SOME OF DALHOUSIE'S EARLY LEADERS

The final entanglement bears on the active support of the Confederacy by members of the Almon clan. The first head of Dalhousie University's Faculty of Medicine and founder of the Medical Association of Nova Scotia was Dr. William Johnston Almon, a scion of the Johnston-Almon clan. The University-of-Edinburg-trained Dr. Almon, who was also a politician, was known as a "rabid supporter of the Confederacy."[8] He gave large sums of money to the cause and assisted Confederates who took refuge in Halifax. He also used his power and influence to assist Confederate blockade runners.[9] Dr. Almon was implicated in helping Confederate pirates hijack the American steamer the *Chesapeake*. This doctor also had a Confederate sympathizing son, who was also a medic, Dr. William Bruce Almon II. This son joined the Confederate Army, where he served as a surgeon.

In 1863, at the heights of the American Civil War, and soon after the death of the famous Confederate general Stonewall Jackson, the elder Dr. Almon, displayed his Confederate sympathies by instituting "a prize at... King's College in Windsor for the student who composed the best ode, in Latin and English, to the memory of Stonewall Jackson."[10]

In investigating Dalhousie's relationship to race and slavery, the panel put forth a series of 13 recommendations, grouped under the rubrics of regret and responsibility, recognition, and repair, with the aim of fostering reconciliation between the university and the African Nova Scotian community and people of African descent more generally.

Prompted by these recommendations, interim president Balser apologized to the Black community.

What this investigation reveals is that we have just begun to scratch the surface of this phenomenon of Canada's institutions of higher learning connections to slavery and race. What has come to light is that Dalhousie University, and by extension the City of Halifax, and the Province of Nova Scotia owe the Black community a debt of gratitude. The Black community is therefore in a solid position to demand reparations.

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6 Letter from Bathurst to Dalhousie, 12 March 1817, Library and Archives Canada, CO 218/29, vol. 29, reel B-1282. On the starvation of the Black Refugees, see Letter from Dalhousie to Bathurst, 16 May 1817, Nova Scotia Archives, GD45:3:1, 19.

7 Nicholas Draper, "Legacies of British Slave-Ownership." www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/42750

8 John Bell, *Confederate Seadog: John Taylor Wood in War and Exile* (Jefferson, N.C.: Mcfarland, 2002) 11.

9 In the context of the American Civil War, blockade runners were Confederate ships that broke through the Union's blockade of Confederate states' sea ports. Blockade runners brought vital food supplies, guns and armament, and mail to the Confederate states.

10 Greg Marquis, In *Armageddon's Shadow: The Civil War and Canada's Maritime Provinces* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998) 169.