

Africville

For many black Nova Scotians the plight of the community of Africville represents their struggle against racism and their struggle to remain a community. Both geographically and politically on the fringe of the City of Halifax, Africville struggled to maintain its sense of community in the face of institutional racism. Today, the efforts of Eddie and Victor Carvery are part of this continuing struggle.

At the core of Africville lay a very distinct sense of community and sense of identity for its residents. Established almost 150 years ago, Africville had to struggle to maintain its integrity as a community in the face of concerted efforts by the city to destroy the bond the black residents had to their land. Like many black Nova Scotians the residents of Africville suffered the consequences of racism which helped to channel many of them in to poverty. As individuals, the residents of Africville felt the powerlessness that poverty and racism brought with it. Despite this, they were proud of their community and worked hard to support each other in tough times.

As a community Africville was also a victim of racism. Starting at around the turn of the century, as the city of Halifax expanded, city officials permitted industrial development to encroach on the residential area of Africville. The area around Africville became the preferred site for city developments which other Halifax neighbourhoods refused to accept. Soon Africville found itself surrounded by fertilizer plants, sewage disposal pits, an infectious diseases hospital and finally the city's largest landfill. Compiling the negative affect of those developments was the city's continued unwillingness to provide the Africville residents with the most basic of services despite the fact that the residents continued to pay taxes to the city. Africville lacked essential services such as running water, proper sewage disposal, paved roads as well as basic police and fire protection. Petition after petition from the Africville community fell on the deaf ears at city hall. It was obvious to many Africville residents that the city had a long term plan to force the residents of Africville off their land and out of their community.

Years of being ignored by racist city councils began to wear on the residents of Africville. Despite their deep sense of historical continuity, the residents of Africville lacked the political power and influence to fight the concerted efforts of the city government to deprive them of their community and ultimately their sense of identity.

In the late 1960's, having deprived Africville of the most basic services needed to maintain the so called basic "minimum standards", the city, under the guise of urban renewal, decided to relocate the residents of Africville and bulldoze their community. It was clear to many Africville residents that despite the paternalistic claims that relocation was in their "best interests", the city was simply using the fact that Africville lacked the services needed to

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maintain the so-called minimum standards, as an opportunity to push the people of Africville off their land. If the truth be told, the reasons for relocation arose out of the institutional racism of the city government. The city's strategy to remove the people of Africville grew more out of a sense of embarrassment and desire for property than any altruistic reasons. The true injustice of these actions by the city was the fact that it was the city government's deliberate neglect of this black community that gave rise to the "need" to get rid of the "embarrassment". Instead of recognizing the sense of community and identity that Africville held for the residents, the city decided that relocation and "compensation" was the only solution to a "problem" that the city had deliberately created in the first place.

To many former Africville residents, the compensation packages offered by the city were an insult. Many of the residents felt that they had no choice but to accept the compensation. The city's strategy of dividing the community further demoralized the residents and forced many to accept the compensation as they witnessed their community being bulldozed around them. The biggest insult to Africville was the city's total ignorance of the concept of community in Africville. By treating residents of Africville on individual basis it neglected the needs of Africville as an independent community. This loss of sense of community and identity was in no way addressed by the city in its strategy of relocation and demolition.

The pain of this loss stays with many former residents of Africville. There is a deep sense of injustice among the former residents. Because the city never dealt with the community as a whole this sense of injustice lingers on to this day. It is this sense of justice denied that has given rise to the peaceful protest of Eddie and Victor Carvery at Seaview Park, the former location of Africville.

Eddie and Victor are former residents of Africville whose family was forced to relocate after their father, "Pa" Carvery, the last resident of Africville was forced to accept the compensation offer of the city. In protest of the city's treatment of the community of Africville and the inadequacy of the compensation offered to replace the loss of their community, Eddie and Victor in the summer of 1994 set up camp in Seaview Park on the site where their house once sat. They vowed to stay in the park until the city agrees to adequately compensate the former residents of Africville or at the very least set up an inquiry into the true reasons why Africville was neglected by city officials for so long and why it was eventually relocated. It is clear that the pain of the relocation and the racist treatment of the community by the city is a wound which has yet to heal.

In a testament to their determination and their cause, Eddie and Victor remained in the park over a bitterly cold winter. Realizing that the brothers were serious in their protest the city decided to act. Again fearing the embarrassment of the issue of Africville, the city decided to