

RACE AND PARTY PLATFORMS IN THE COMING NOVA SCOTIA ELECTIONS

March 11, 2021

Key Observations

- It is imperative that all levels of government respect Indigenous sovereignty. Specifically, this includes looking for opportunities to build relationships with Indigenous people on their own terms. Politicians are responsible for doing the necessary work to meaningfully engage with Indigenous people.
- Reparations and formally declaring the African Nova Scotian community as a distinct population are viable policy options for acknowledging and compensating African Nova Scotians for historical and ongoing injustices.
- The current model of public safety (policing, incarceration, and punishment) must be abolished. Public safety must be transformed to account for race, gender and class disparities and include provisions for housing, trauma support, childcare, income assistance and education. Prioritizing community services will enhance both public safety and public health.

Event Abstract

Race has always been a defining, and silenced, aspect of Nova Scotia politics. Race intersects with gender, class, sovereignty, development, gentrification and so much more. This discussion focused on what all provincial parties need to address in their next policy platforms to be taken seriously on the politics of race.

Purpose of the Note

On March 11, 2021, the MacEachen Institute hosted a panel of speakers to discuss public policy options related to the politics of race. This event was the fourth in a five-part series aimed at supporting public policy discussion leading up to the Nova Scotia provincial election.

Speakers

- **Dorene Bernard** (Mi'kmaq grassroots grandmother and water protector)
- **Lynn Jones** (African Nova Scotian labour advocate)
- **El Jones** (spoken word poet, educator, journalist and community activist)
- **Aruna Dhara** (family physician and advocate for justice-oriented options in healthcare).

This panel was moderated by **Dr. Ajay Parasram** (founding fellow at the MacEachen Institute).

About the MacEachen Institute

The MacEachen Institute for Public Policy and Governance at Dalhousie University is a nationally focused, non-partisan, interdisciplinary institute designed to support the development of progressive public policy and to encourage greater citizen engagement.

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Speaker Observations

Dorene Bernard

- All orders of government must recognize Indigenous sovereignty and respect Indigenous treaty rights. This includes making space for Mi'kmaq people to adjudicate for themselves and to follow Mi'kmaq laws instead of colonial ones.
- Indigenous people are criminalized for asserting cultural practises, including advocating for the protection of the environment. The ongoing criminalization of Indigenous people for asserting treaty rights to protect land, water and the rights of future generations must be stopped.
- The provincial and federal government have a responsibility to uphold their own laws. Consequently, Indigenous people must be meaningfully consulted and involved in the development of policy. Further, environmental protection laws and treaty agreements must be respected and upheld by all orders of government.
- The Mi'kmaq law Netukulimk, which was recently added to the Sustainability Act in NS, is not just a word to throw around. Netukulimk is the fundamental Mi'kmaq law that underscores the Indigenous worldview of relationships, reciprocity, reverence and responsibility to Mother Earth, water and other resources for the survival of all life (otherwise known as Msit Nokomaq, all our relations). This is tied to the inherent individual and collective rights Mi'kmaq hold under the Peace and Friendship Treaties and specifically the Mi'kmaq treaty right to lands, waters and resources for all generations to come. It is time that all governments start to work towards meaningful reconciliation and honour Mi'kmaq inherent and treaty rights, which in turn will benefit all.

Lynn Jones

- African Nova Scotians have distinct cultural traditions, politics and social practices and should therefore be recognized as a distinct people by all orders of government.
- Reparations are a set of tools that must be used to formally recognize and compensate for historical and ongoing injustices. While reparations cases for African people have not been heard or settled in Canada, they have been in the USA and the Caribbean where contemporary injustices are a direct result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the ongoing process of colonialism.
- African Nova Scotians face high rates of unemployment and are more likely to be engaged in precarious forms of work compared to the general population. As a result, many African Nova Scotians face housing insecurity. Establishing an institution that particularly addresses employment challenges in the African Nova Scotian community is a viable policy option and a first step in addressing systemic inequities.

El Jones

- The abolitionist movement advocates for replacing the current system of policing, punishment and containment with a new system that prioritizes public safety through connecting people with community services, supportive housing, trauma counselling, child-care and universal basic income. The province has a role to play in funding, supporting and delivering these services.
- The abolitionist movement calls for a model of public safety that addresses systemic racial, class and gender inequities. Therefore, government response to the call for abolition must also include reckoning with the legacy of colonialism by recognizing and respecting Indigenous sovereignty.
- Community solidarity is one of the most revolutionary actions in the face of power and neo-liberal politics. While people may have different lived experiences, it is still possible to unite over common goals.

Aruna Dhara

- The social determinants of health (race, housing, food security, income level, etc.) strongly influence overall health outcomes. As such, the provincial government must acknowledge how those social determinants shape overall health outcomes by creating public health policies that prioritize housing, income assistance, pharmacare and employment opportunities.
- The provincial government must acknowledge the role of systemic racism in the healthcare system. One avenue for addressing this is through improving the diversity of care practitioners and availability of different treatment and care options. This may include valuing informal care work and recognizing that care looks different depending on a community's socio-cultural context.
- The provincial government must listen to, respect and respond to the needs of different communities. One policy option for achieving this is to form a citizen council to inform the government on community priorities and highlight opportunities to improve the social determinants of health.

Conclusion

There is an urgent need to address systemic racism in the healthcare and judicial systems, as well as within society-level socio-economic, cultural and political systems. All orders of government have a role to play in fully acknowledging historical injustices perpetrated against BIPOC communities. This includes respecting Indigenous sovereignty, recognizing African Nova Scotians as a distinct people and adequately compensating BIPOC for historic and ongoing injustices. Further, the provincial government must act to promote health and public safety through investment in public services such as supportive and affordable housing, mental health services, crisis support, pharmacare, childcare and income assistance.

More from the MacEachen Institute

The Institute is working to create resources and policy discussions focussed on the COVID-19 crisis. These include briefing notes like this one as well as panel discussions, videos and media commentary. You can find [all resources related to COVID-19 on our website](#).

Other briefing notes in this series

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- [Climate Adaptation in Nova Scotia: Overblown or Underwater?](#)
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