

Apology of the President of the University of King's College to the African Nova Scotian Community

Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia

June 2, 2026

Most of the recent progress at King's stems from the launch in 2018 of the Scholarly Inquiry on King's and Slavery. I must stress that this Inquiry probably would not have happened without the leadership of Dalhousie in establishing the Lord Dalhousie Panel. It also would not have happened without the support it received from faculty, staff and student members of the King's Equity Committee of that time, which has recently been reconstituted with Archy Beals as its Chair.

The findings of the Inquiry were published in early 2020 in a series of papers, still on the King's website: one authored by King's professor Shirley Tillotson explores the university's indirect connections to slavery; one by Karolyn Smardz Frost and David States explores direct connections and a third by King's professor Henry Roper considers the nature of the connections between the King's College in Nova Scotia and the Kings' College in New York that became Columbia. Some words of Dr. Tillotson are an apt conclusion, not only for her paper, but for the Inquiry as a whole. Referring to the wealth generated through enslavement in and beyond Nova Scotia that flowed to King's over five decades in government grants, student tuition and fees, and donations, she wrote:

The implication I draw is that we inherit an institution funded at its origin by unjustly extracted profits and taxes charged on blood-soaked goods.

Frost and States focused on those associated with King's in its founding and early decades for their direct involvement with enslavement, through the ownership of people, their business with those who owned people, or the views or attitudes they expressed or demonstrated towards enslavement. They documented those associated with King's who opposed slavery. Their broader conclusions was this:

In the growing debate over slavery and the slave trade, those associated with King's generally supported the continuation of slavery, as part of the established order they came to Nova Scotia to uphold.

In its founding era, King's was part of the ideology of white supremacy that made enslavement and the slave system possible.

In December of 2019 and January of 2020, we hosted a series of meetings to share findings from the Inquiry with members of the African Nova Scotian community. An information session for the community was scheduled for Wednesday, March 18, 2020. There, we intended to make an apology for our history and its continuing legacy. For obvious reasons, that event never happened. That apology is now long overdue – which is one of the reasons I asked for this gathering.

We did however hold an information session within King's on January 24 of 2020, before the pandemic hit. Then, I said this:

Slavery is foundational to the systemic racism and oppression Canadians of African descent have experienced for decades and continue to experience in Nova Scotia and Canada to this day.

To address that legacy, working with African Canadians and African Nova Scotians in particular, we have to acknowledge its existence and its roots in slavery in and beyond Nova Scotia. Our Scholarly Inquiry is not an end point, and it is certainly not an end in itself. Instead, it is part of the continuing and sustained conversation we need to have with people of African descent about how we make King's a university for them and a university that makes a valuable contribution to their communities.

We have endeavoured to live up to this statement of intent through our growing partnership with the Centre, the work we have done with the PREP Academy, our continuing relationship with the DBDLI and our collaboration with Dalhousie colleagues. Karen will speak to the actions that have been taken and are underway at King's in more detail. I will simply say that in the past year our actions have culminated with the creation of the African Nova Scotian Journalism Initiative, under which up to three African Nova Scotian

students per year are admitted to study journalism at King's free of tuition and academic fees. They culminated also with a range of other initiatives following PREP Academy recommendations to create community among and support for African Nova Scotian and Black students at King's.

These and other measures begin to address King's accountability for the ways it was financed from enslavement and perpetuated the legacies of enslavement into the present day. They acknowledge and seek to begin rectifying the failure of King's over many decades to create spaces where African Nova Scotian and Black students, faculty and staff could feel seen, welcomed, and valued, or to provide educational or professional opportunities for the members of African Nova Scotian and Black communities.

These measures do not however replace the need for a formal expression of the continuing accountability of King's. Tonight's gathering creates space for that expression of accountability, both to link our actions and commitments to that accountability and to ensure that King's commitment to addressing Anti-Black Racism not only continues but grows and deepens. Therefore, as President of the University of King's College:

I acknowledge with humility the harm caused by our institution's historical connections to slavery, anti-black racism and racial inequity. I recognize that King's has benefited from the enslavement of Black people and contributed to systems that dehumanized Black people and excluded African Nova Scotian and Black communities from full participation and belonging in higher education and the opportunities higher education makes possible.

For this, we are deeply sorry.

We are deeply committed to taking responsibility for our history through actions that contribute to reparative justice for the descendants of those enslaved and those harmed by the legacies of slavery, including segregation and ongoing exclusion.

We are deeply committed to the practices of listening, learning, investing, building trust, and being guided in our continuing work to

address Anti-Black racism through partnerships and collaborations with African Nova Scotian and Black organizations and communities, including the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, the Delmore Buddy Daye Learning Institute and the PREP Academy.