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“We are the living archive”: An Interview with El Jones on Abolition and Writing

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"We are the living archive": An Interview with El Jones on Abolition and Writing

Karina Vernon

I met El Jones when she was writer in residence in the Department of English at the University of Toronto Scarborough in the Spring of 2021, just months after the intense summer of demonstrations against police brutality in Canada and globally had crested. All of our classes and poetry readings that year were virtual, but El's presence in those virtual spaces was exhilarating for faculty and students alike — especially so for Black, Indigenous, and racialized members of the university community. It was electrifying for us to hear El refuse the institutional discourses and logics of equity, diversity, and inclusion; her writing and analysis of social and institutional racism comes out of the Black radical tradition in Canada and beyond, which is not about seeing more Black faces in high places; it is about fundamentally abolishing the society that requires a hierarchy and an oppressed class to continue. I knew I needed another opportunity to be in conversation with her.

El Jones is a poet, journalist, professor, and activist living in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She teaches at Mount Saint Vincent University, where she was named the 15th Nancy's Chair in Women's Studies in 2017. Jones was Halifax's Poet Laureate from 2013 to 2015. Her first book was *Live from the Afrikan Resistance!* (Roseway, 2014), a collection of poems that draws from the aesthetics and politics of hip-hop, dub, and calypso traditions. *Abolitionist Intimacies* (Fernwood, 2022), Jones's pathbreaking second book, records over a decade of the experiences of Black Nova Scotians in carceral systems and is the first book to do so. It harnesses the power of poetry, song, memos, journalism, and academic essays to materialize the injustices of the present and to imagine a future beyond the carceral state. Since 2016, she has co-hosted a radio show on CKDU-FM called *Black Power Hour*, where listeners from prisons call in to rap, read poetry, share news, and help organize community struggles.

This interview was conducted via Zoom on 29 June 2022.

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Karina Vernon: I've started doing this new thing whenever I'm teaching or presenting research. I learned to open things in a different way from Eugenia Zuroski, who's at McMaster University, who draws this idea, in turn, from Katherine McKittrick and Minelle Mahtani, two geographers. Instead of asking students, "where do you come from?," which is a question that racialized people hear way too much, they suggest we ask, "Where do you know from?" This question often gets to the kind of knowledges that are not legitimated within certain spaces, particularly the university. So maybe I can begin by asking you if that question resonates. Where do you know from?

El Jones: I always call people. Whenever I meet people, I kind of warn them, "If you do something you're going to get a call from me. The minute I need a social worker or a lawyer, I'm going to rope you in, so don't tell me what you do, don't tell me you're a nurse; then I'm going to call you when I need a nurse." I learn by listening.

I wrote the first draft of my book [*Abolitionist Intimacies*] in Banff. You know, they do readings. I realized after, I never describe anything visually. I have never once done a visual description of somebody. I would never be like, "Fatuma is a brown-skinned woman." I would never do that, but I always talk about conversations, and almost every essay opens with me talking to Desmond [Cole], or saying something that somebody said to me, and I just realized how oral my knowing is. Everything is through what I'm hearing, which I think is partly because, especially with prison, you go through the phone and you don't see people, and you know people for years and never even see what they look like.

It matches something I always say, which is that activism is ninety per cent listening and ten per cent not taking no for an answer.

Karina Vernon: Your answer is also an answer about community and about a poetics that takes you away from the visual language of race.

El Jones: I'm obviously on stage as a performer, but I actually don't like people looking at me. I don't like looking at pictures of myself and I never watched myself, I never listened to myself back. I will say about spoken word that it's ephemeral, and I like that it's ephemeral; I like that the performance exists in the moment and it's just sound.

Do you know KALMUNITY Vibe Collective?[1] It's a loose Black collective — there's a core band and then there are singers, dancers and spoken word artists — and it's all live, organic improv. When we're on

stage and it's really good, you wish they were taping that, or that you could hold it, but that goes against the practice of the improv, the practice being that you are in the moment, and then the moment goes, which is very much against our current investment in archiving. The archive is very trendy, for reasons, of course! We're all talking about the archive all the time, and it's interesting when to not be in the archive, right? Because Black people are so erased, obviously we want to be placed, and we want to discover. But when are archival practices not the practice we need? Practices of forgetting are also interesting, and not allowing something to be solidified. I like that a lot.

Karina Vernon: It's interesting that you talk about ephemerality because I was going to ask you about how your poetry often returns to the past — to past context of resistance and rebellion, especially the poetry that you develop with youth. And I was thinking about what that kind of work means for young people and the importance of bringing the past into the present. So, it's interesting to hear you talking about the importance of ephemerality and of not getting caught in that drive to archive in the same way with the same colonial logic. Is it helpful to think about the way poetry monumentalizes history?

El Jones: I will say that with youth, a lot of my poems are about naming things, like naming actual people. I used to do poems when I was Poet Laureate [of Halifax] — you get invited to things like "Youth in Care"[2] — and I would make poems with their names in it. They just light up when they hear their own name. It's not just children; adults too. Which is the griot tradition.

People like to feel seen and significant, and you can give them that in this kind of poetry.

I went through that phase when I wrote a lot about Black women, and now I write a lot about prisons and stuff, which is harder to transport, you know. (When I go to Jamaica, I have to write a whole set of new poems because I have all these long-ass poems about prison in Canada and it's not relevant to anybody.) When I was writing other kinds of stuff, yeah, it was very much grounded in history, and it's always, "What can we bring forth from the past into the present?"

Which is something like the argument for Black August, right? The sort of complaints we have about Black History Month, which is to memorialize firsts, but in no meaningful way. So it just becomes, "The first person to do this; the first person to do that." Dave Chappelle has

that joke about "Never be the first as a Black person!" and that kind of static history that many people have taught.

But the point of the past isn't to be like, "The first person did this!" It's to look at those continuums: what did we take from the past to be revolutionary and liberate ourselves in the present? So that's what a lot of those poems are doing, trying to take those messages, and then it is kind of spiritual. Like Harriet Tubman. I always used to say that I feel Harriet rising in me whenever I do that poem.[3] I do feel that I do enter into that space. You feel the ancestors in some way move through you.

Karina Vernon: Your next book, *Abolitionist Intimacies*, is coming out in November, 2022 with Fernwood. Fernwood's a press with an explicit social justice mandate. I'm wondering if you could talk about the landscape of publishing and the arts in Canada with relation to Black artists and readers?

El Jones: It's sort of funny because, I mean, obviously I've managed to get platforms, and I'm gonna say, without trying! [*laughs*] But kind of. I never tell people what I'm doing; people come to me. I guess I've always just laid my work down, and the reception of it isn't my business. So, I don't do contests; I've never submitted anything for publication. Both times with my book, they approached me. I'm glad for that. I probably could have perhaps a bigger career in some ways, like, I write for the [*Halifax*] *Examiner*. But there were no limits on that. As I kept with it, I started doing different kinds of pieces — I started doing personal essay writing that wasn't journalism. There was no word limit, there was no, "No, you can't do that." People haven't read that work! People have no idea what I did for five years at the *Examiner*, like, every week.[4] I was the first person to write about "Bell Let's Talk" and nobody's read it.[5] I was writing about it in 2014 that Bell had the prison contracts. That's the geographic margins of Canada, right? If you live in Halifax, Nova Scotia, there's just so much stuff that you're producing that people don't know what's happening because you're not at the centre.

Tim [Bousquet][6] never told me what to do, but nobody's ever read that work. I could have pushed to be in *Maclean's*, in *The Walrus* or something, and people would read it, but then they'll tell you what work to do; they're editing your work; they don't like this, they don't like that; "Don't say that." So I think I've always sacrificed a certain amount. It's one of the reasons why I feel like I can never move from Nova Scotia. It's the being in it that people respond to. I'm writing between the prison calls, and that's in there, and how I feel about it is in there.

As far as the publishing industry, I'm glad that somehow, someway, I managed to build up a path into writing in the way I want.

In my baby book, it says, "El is very stubborn; if you tell her the sky is blue, she will argue with you and insist it's green. But very sensitive. When I read her books where the witch dies, she cries and won't listen to the ending." And that is so true. [*laughs*] I've just never been able to make myself do things that I don't want to do, particularly long term. I can't think in a different way; I can't write in a different way; I can't be in a different way. I can't speak in a different way.

But it's not only that, because I've had stuff, like, that's had a good readership. I actually did a viral essay about my mom and Tessa Virtue[7] and I still didn't get a publishing contract, so that says a lot about Black women, right? We don't get these contracts. What do we have to do to get them? So I sent it [the manuscript for *Abolitionist Intimacies*] to this agent — this was in February of 2020 — and she wrote me back and she said she couldn't see how anybody would be interested in this. This is a book about prisons, police, front-line work, abolition, deportation . . . of course what happens in May of 2020, right? And that very much discouraged me. I wrote about this in my book. I closed the door in my office and I just started crying, and I just thought, *what is wrong with me*, you know? *Why is it, no matter what I do, I can never get a job?* — because this was before I was tenured, because I was teaching at universities around here [Nova Scotia] for years and they didn't give a shit about me. They wouldn't let me finish my PhD; I write this book and this agent. . . . Like, is there something wrong with me? How do other people around me sail through PhDs and into jobs? They have books. How do they have all these things?

I do this work, I know it's good work because I see how people respond to it when I share it, but then when it's time to get the agent or the publishing deal, then, "It's not for you," and that did upset me. This book, the first draft of it was written in 2019. And it's only coming out three years later.

Karina Vernon: It's infuriating to hear that you were writing the work. And it didn't go anywhere and wasn't picked up — and then 2020 happened.

El Jones: It's the same with universities. You're standing in the university and teaching in the classroom and the university is asking, "How do we get Black faculty?" and I keep saying to them, "Why don't you look in the garbage?" I've explicitly said that to them. But this idea, which has

to do with Black women, right? And the many readings of our labour. It's taken for granted. It's not seen as labour; it's not seen as intellectually worthwhile. We do so much cutting-edge work all over, not just in the academy. It's not recognized until a white person names it and then suddenly there'll be a SSHRC section. We know this, right?

There is a section in my book where I say sometimes I lie awake in bed, and I think about all the books and stuff I *haven't* written.

Karina: Oh!

El Jones: But then I think about whose life is worthwhile. Like, which call should I have not taken so that I could have written this essay? I talk about that in this [*Abolitionist Intimacies*]. I relate it to Abdoul [Abdi][8] sitting in Lindsay,[9] sitting in the cell before deportation and the wall is full of these names and dates and he understands that these are the names and dates of people who have been deported. And he describes it like sitting in his own tomb.

So I always think about it as a writing thing, those things that are written on the wall. We are the living archive. Isn't it better to leave our mark on *lives*?

I'm not against writing, obviously! But with writing, it's about the practice: who am I writing it for? Why am I writing it? It is more important to pull Abdoul from that cell than to monumentalize it or to write it down in a book, even though I, ultimately, did.

I just have so little to do with the Canadian literary scene in any way, like, when I went to the Governor General's Awards because when I was Poet Laureate, you get the invite. And then, the only other time you're going back is if you actually fucking win one, not even shortlisted. So I guess I better go!

You know, walking around, and people are like, "What do you do?" "I do spoken word." "Right, oh, you act." [*laughs*] And then you realize that there's no purpose for you to be there because the whole point is to schmooze with agents and publishers and I was not interested at that time, and you know, it's spoken word, so I don't need you. And therefore, you don't need me, so like, what is the point of any of this?

In terms of knowing how the industry works, I'll tell you my Griffin [Prize] piece. So this is when we had the Rising Star thing,[10] so we all came into Toronto, and then it was the night of the Griffin, and Dionne Brand was reading. Desmond [Cole] had come to my reading and he wanted to go see Dionne, but we didn't have tickets, but David Chariandy was one of the mentors, so we're all jumping into a cab and

following Chariandy, who was actually invited, but me and Desmond are sneaking in.

So we end up coming in in the second half, right before Dionne's reading. But we missed the first half, so I didn't know what was going on. This person starts reading and I *genuinely* thought that they were the poet, because I don't know who's nominated, I only know Dionne. So someone gets up and they're like, "Poetry . . . the architecture. . . ." I thought it was a poem! After a minute, they say the person's name because they're just introducing the person. Oh fuck, that's just the introduction! So I just started laughing so hard, and then Desmond's like, "Why are you laughing?" And I tell him I genuinely thought that was the poem, and then Desmond starts laughing, and Chariandy's looking at us like, "What are you guys doing?" And we're causing all this disruption.

It just made me laugh because this is what is expected. We're all going to be very serious, and I'm going to talk really slowly and really profoundly about this work. That's not to say anything about the poets nominated! I just mean the thing around it, which is so CanLit. That's my CanLit joke, that you can't tell the difference between someone introducing the work and the work itself, because everyone has to speak with such ponderous significance.

I just don't think art is like that. I want things for myself, but I want other people to have them too. I enjoy things the most when we're all having them.

Karina Vernon: I was going to ask you about what you think has changed and not changed since 2020.

El Jones: I used to say that there's fifty abolitionists in Canada, and we all know each other, and now there's 10,000, so that's good. [*laughs*]

I mean, I have a lot of critiques. In Canada, how is it that we move from George Floyd — a working-class man accused of passing a bad $20, with a defense that he's on drugs, who has a cop kneel on his neck — how do we move from that to grants for Black businesses?[11] The only thing we got in Canada substantially out of this in terms of "change" is entrepreneurship. But I do understand, because *capitalism*, obviously. Does anything make more clear the relationship of capitalism and class to all of this?

They drop the mandatory minimums but quite explicitly not for Black people because C-22[12] is like, "We're getting rid of minimums." And then they're like, not life, not guns, not drugs, not borders — okay, so all the shit that Black people "supposedly" do — not us. In fact, we're

going to intensify all the anti-Black policing, but if your white kid does drugs, don't worry! That's literally what's being signaled, so we didn't get justice out of it. We certainly haven't got anything for the people living in shelters and people living in tents and people in prisons. We can't even get oversight for CBSA [Canada Border Services Agency]. Never mind abolishing CBSA, we can't even get a complaints mechanism for CBSA, which so many Black people are bound up in, but we can get loans — not even grants — for Black businesses.

I think that just says everything about the Black elite and Canada. I've been very critical of this, and Desmond [Cole] and I have taken a ton of personal and professional and quite life-destructive heat, because, you know, we're class traitors. [*laughs*]

But I don't know how you can talk about things I talked about and not have an analysis of power. And Black people also have power, and one of the things that we have to come to terms with in 2022, etc., is that these sort of mechanisms of silence that made sense in 1920 like if you only had one Black teacher, then, sure, rape all the girls, I guess, we still need you if you only have one teacher. This is why Black women have talked about this in Black Power and Civil Rights. This is why Black feminism is developing, because, keeping your mouth shut on behalf of the movement has always been the requirement of Black women.

Who's around the table? All these new organizations all popped up and all somehow have all these grants with millions of dollars kicking around our communities going nowhere. Being used for office furniture and can't get a penny of it into the hands of people who need it, and nothing has changed on the ground. You still can't get people to answer a call from prison or give grocery money to a woman in a shelter.

I think all activists have that trajectory, like when you're young, you recognize white supremacy and you talk about that, and then the more you embed into Black communities, you realize the way that Black elite power works alongside white supremacy. And that Black organizations' role is to leverage proximity to whiteness in order to extend their own power, and I mean Rocky Jones talks to us a lot — if you read Rocky Jones's biography,[13] it's all about this. When they form BUF [Black United Front][14] and immediately BUF is undermined from within the community and they're going to the government and saying, "Do you want this radical to have this group? Give *us* funding." This is a long-term mechanism in Canada and elsewhere, of whenever Black people

are on the move, in the middle of a mass movement, white people will appoint elite Black gatekeepers to suppress us.

I've watched events where people are saying things like, "We can't have thousands of Black people in the streets, there needs to be a leader." And that leader implicitly needs to be a cis, straight, titled professional, rich man. Women aren't real leaders, queer people aren't real leaders. You hear that rhetoric with BLM — and there are critiques of BLM that I'm with, especially the money stuff. But the early critique of BLM was, "They don't speak to me because I'm a dude." Oh, so we have to sit here while you guys were being leaders, that's fine, but the minute queer Black women are leading, then it's just a "queer group"?

I'm extremely critical of what's happened [since 2020]. I don't think we've used it to build a mass movement. We allowed ourselves to get distracted and co-opted. Because it went from George Floyd, a cop kneeled on his neck, and then suddenly we were talking about racism in the workplace. I get why that's an issue, but is it *this* issue? This isn't about Black businesses or the racism I experience in the university or how somebody sees my hair. Those are important things — I'm not saying they're not important things — but they're not in *this thing*.

When I complain about this, my partner is like, "Why the fuck would the government give you a grant to destroy their prisons? Why would the state give you money to take down the state?" I know there are people reading this that are going to scream at me, "Doesn't the government give you money mostly because you're ineffective?"

But that is the taboo in the Black community — to speak about senior Black academics who enact power on us as juniors, about senior Black cabinet ministers — when we were doing Abdoul, we were up against a Black immigration minister [Ahmed Hussen], and people told us that we should shut up because, "He experiences racism, now you guys are attacking him." He does experience racism — correct. But he is also willing to deport Black people.

Zora Neale Hurston told us all this a century ago: "All my skinfolk ain't kinfolk." But this is so hard, especially in Canada . . . this is the history of calling radical Blackness "Communism" or "white leftist stuff." There is a long narrative pretending that we don't have a native Black radicalism to ourselves. The Left blackness is where the white brainwashed people are, and the Center that just want EDI [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion] are actually the true voices of the Black community.

When I talk about the elite class, I'm not exempting myself. I'm a professor. No critique I make isn't something I don't worry about in myself.

Karina Vernon: What about inside the university since 2020? I was at UTSC for eleven years before 2020, and then all of a sudden people became aware of me. [*laughs*] I've spent the last two years on every committee. . . .

El Jones: I don't do it.

Karina Vernon: Okay, that's what I was going to ask. I'm so drained. I'm so exhausted.

El Jones: I often say that academia is like Harriet Tubman coming to Canada — it's the neutral zone; it's where we gather our resources. I have resources from doing this work that I can then put into the movement. Time is quite flexible. You only have to teach two, maybe three courses, so the rest of the days I'm free to go to court.

My whole thing was that I was precariously employed, like, I've taught on the campus of literally every university in Nova Scotia except St. FX. Not once did I get an LTA. I went for a couple of tenure-track jobs. I didn't get them, and then I'm like, what changed about my work in 2020?

I have written some probably intemperate emails to administration on the topic. How dare you release a Black Lives Matter statement and talk about how you're going to be reviewing diversity; like, I had to live in my car. I was homeless while I was teaching for you! Like, you tried to kill me. You tried to render me dead in a lot of ways. You took deliberate steps to make sure that I couldn't feed myself; that I couldn't live in comfort.

And that's not just me. I only know my own story, but it's many, many people's. How dare you discard us? How dare you treat us as disposable and then act like you're doing us a favor because now you realize Black people exist.

At least I hung on. How many other grad students and people just left?

I think that our role — those of us who are in the university in the elite classes who have this access — what we have to figure out is how to extract those resources and bring them out.

Karina Vernon: I have just one last question for you. This interview is for the special issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature*, the Black Lives Matter special issue. And I was reluctant to take on the editorship of a

special issue. I'm like, "Why should it be a 'special issue'?" It's a problem in the way that Canadian literary studies approaches Black literary cultures. But I'm not sure there would have been a special issue like this before 2020, even though organizing against extra-judicial killings of Black people in Canada goes back decades. And BLM Canada goes back to 2014. So this special issue is one of the things that happened [after 2020]. There are limits to the idea of a special issue, but I know that I'm participating in it, too, because Black Life, abolition, and Black literature should be what we're thinking about, too, in Canadian literature.

El Jones: I actually have an essay at the end of my book called "What is Desire to the Abolitionist?" about how often at odds our own desires are with what we know to be true. I can both know that the reason that this institution doesn't value me is the reason why it doesn't value the people I work with, because it's not even about me. If you value people in prison, then you would value the work.

I can know that it is more important that people in prison read and understand my work than it is anybody else. Love for your community is more important than awards. You can know those things, but it doesn't make a difference, you still want the agent; you still want the awards and all those things.

I don't know that every moment can be an ethical crisis. bell hooks tells us that we will fail our own values at every point, and all we can do is try and do our best within that. I find that helps. You know, everything that we do we just try and put in our bit for a movement that stretches 500 years before us and will stretch 500 years later.

And if people have something to say about it, then they can say something about it, and all we can do is be honest, like this is where it may have failed; this is what I was thinking; this is where my reasoning might have been faulty. I think that's all we can do.

And I would say this about prisons. Prisons aren't going to fall tomorrow. I know that putting money on the phone gives the prison system money, but it's more important that people be able to talk than it is to deprive the prison system of their resources in this context, so I guess I'm funding the prison industrial complex thing again. [*laughs*] I will always be making compromised choices because we live in a white supremacist-capitalist-colonial society that doesn't allow us to have free choices.

But I firmly also believe in our possibilities for liberation. Liberation is not a moment, it is a long struggle, as we know.

I don't think we have to feel guilty. Audre Lorde tells us guilt is a completely useless emotion and it's really a self-centred emotion. And as Black people, we do carry a lot of shame and guilt about being in these positions that our ancestors couldn't be. Part of the Black emotional register is that, at least it's not as bad as what your grandmother went through. Your grandmother couldn't even go to school and here you are in university, so shut up, right? Coming to terms with that, I think, is quite traumatic for Black people; that, like, we're not really supposed to be here. And we are here.

There's something that Robert Wright[15] always says: "For those of us that have moved into these professional jobs, the wisdom of our grandmothers isn't going to help us." They don't have advice for what you do when your colleagues have tenure and you don't. Because that was not a situation they can imagine. This goes back to your question about where do you know from. We know from these well-established practices from our grandmothers how they dealt with sorrow and how they dealt with despair, but now we're in these institutions, and how do we apply that? It's not there for us, so we're there with no guide.

It's the same for literature. We're just stepping into so many of these things in so many different ways. It's not like we haven't had Black writers, but it's been contained to certain types of knowledge that they like us to do — fiction, and so forth. Okay, but I'm doing abolition stuff. What does that even look like in the Canadian scene? We have to make that for ourselves. It gets so hard because we have to keep having that encounter with ourselves, with the past, with these community values, with our sense of guilt from being in this position, of knowing intimately how much better off I am. Like, at least I'm not in prison, why am I complaining about the university?

There's a reason why our ancestors had the weighing of the heart. In the end, what was in your heart?

Karina Vernon: Thank you so much for this, El. I admire your courage, energy, and commitment. I think you're a treasure.

El Jones: I think it's good that my mother never praised me. [*laughs*] My mother grew up in colonial Trinidad. With my mom, there was never a doubt that when I open my mouth I have something to say, and that I have a right to say it and I'm going to say it. That is a very liberatory thing that I was brought up with, the Trinidadian tradition of arguing. We love to argue with everybody. When I was young, we'd be arguing at the dinner table, and I was the youngest but nobody gives you any

quarter. You're expected to speak with everybody else. There was no sense that children couldn't be significant. I didn't realize that those things aren't always given to Black people. Black women do not often — I'm also lighter-skinned and there's other things going on here, right? Lighter-skinned women are treated better than darker-skinned women, so it's not totally surprising that I have more sense of my ability to be in the world. That matters.

I come from a matriarchy. Until this generation, we have all women and only one boy per generation. And Jones family women have always been, right back — like, one of my aunts or cousins or something like that were sleeping with Langston Hughes. [*laughs!*] One of them was a dancer. These Trinidadian women that would come out of Trinidad and move around the world, and were so liberated for their time, and doing things and that was always taught to me, and that, I'm grateful for, and that's the last piece of knowing — that.

Notes

[1] kalmunity.com.

[2] Youth in Care Canada is a national organization that aims to give voice to the concerns of youth in the child welfare system.

[3] This is a reference to El Jones's poem "Harriet (Harriet Tubman)."

[4] Readers can access a treasure trove of archived writing on justice, abolition, and grassroots community activism by El Jones for *The Halifax Examiner* at Muck Rack, muckrack.com/el-jones/articles.

[5] See, for example, "Press 1 To Accept this Call" (16 Jan. 2016) and "Hell, Let's Talk" (30 Jan. 2016).

[6] Investigative reporter Tim Bousquet is founder of *The Halifax Examiner*.

[7] "My Mother and Tessa Virtue" (*Halifax Examiner*, 9 June, 2019) is a tender and hilarious portrait of Jones's mother and the ice dancer "that unbent her, at last, into Canadian fandom." See www.halifaxexaminer.ca/featured/my-mother-and-tessa-virtue/.

[8] Abdoul Abdi and his sister, Fatouma Abdi, came to Canada from Somalia in 2000 under the refugee program. The following year they were taken from their aunts and put into Nova Scotia's Department of Community Services, where, among other abuses, no one applied for citizenship for the underaged children. In 2017 and 2018 Abdi faced deportation after completing a prison term. Abdi, along with a number of supporters including El Jones, fought the deportation order and won. In 2020 Abdoul and Fatouma Abdi sued Nova Scotia and the Children's Aid Society for physical, sexual, and psychological abuse endured while in foster care.

[9] Lindsay Jail (Central East Correctional Centre), a medium/maximum security jail in Lindsay, Ontario.

[10] El Jones was selected by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson as a 2019 Rising Star for the Writers' Trust of Canada.

[11] For example, the Government of Canada's "Black Entrepreneurship Program," a part-

nership between the Federal Government, Black-led businesses, and banks. See ised-isde.canada.ca/site/black-entrepreneurship-program/en.

[12] See Bill C-22 (section 1.1.), "Repeal of Mandatory Minimum Sentences of Imprisonment for Offences Involving Firearms, Weapons and Substances" from the *Criminal Code* (30 Oct. 2021). See lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/LegislativeSummaries/432C22E#:~:text=Bill%20C%E2%80%9122%20removes%20mandatory,to%20firearms%20or%20other%20weapons.

[13] *Burnley "Rocky" Jones: Revolutionary*. Fernwood Press, 2016.

[14] Founded in 1965 by Rocky Jones, William Pearly Oliver and others, BUF was a Black Nationalist organization based loosely on the Black Panthers' ten-point program. BUF remained active until the mid-1990s.

[15] Robert Seymore Wright, a social worker and sociologist who contributes pro-bono work to The Peoples' Counseling Clinic, a community-based teaching clinic in Nova Scotia.