

## In Memoriam - Burnley Allan "Rocky" Jones

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### In Memoriam

**JONES, Dr Burnley Allan "Rocky" Jones**, BA, MA, LLB, LLD, ONS (August 26, 1941 - July 29, 2013)

The Schulich School of Law and the Dalhousie University community is deeply saddened by the sudden passing of Burnley "Rocky" Jones, at the age of 71. We have lost a champion for education and a great friend. Rocky was a much-loved mentor and a source of strength for many.

#### *Community roots*

As one of ten children growing up in his family in Truro, Nova Scotia, Rocky knew the strength of community and spent his life working to empower those who did not yet know their own strength. His social activism began in the peace and civil rights movement of the 1960s. He was as an active member of the Students Union for Peace Action (SUPA) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Described as "a fierce champion of racial equality and justice" when he was named to the Order of Nova Scotia in 2010, his mission was one of education, peace, human rights and the development of a just society open to all persons, regardless of race, colour, creed or economic standing. He was a founding member of The Black United Front of Nova Scotia, the National Black Coalition of Canada, the African Canadian Liberation Movement, and the Nova Scotia Project and Kwacha House, to name just a few.

#### *Community leadership*

His leadership in the community was instrumental in founding two programs at Dalhousie: the Transition Year Program and the Indigenous Blacks and Mi'kmaq Initiative. The Transition Year Program was designed for First Nations and African Canadian adults to redress educational inequities faced by members of the First Nations and African Canadian communities. The Indigenous Blacks and Mi'kmaq Initiative was established in 1989 with the purpose of reducing discrimination by increasing the representation of Indigenous Blacks and Mi'kmaq in the legal profession.

Rocky received his BA and MA in history. In 1992, he was the valedictorian of his graduating class and was part of the first graduating class of the Indigenous Blacks and Mi'kmaq Initiative at what was then the Dalhousie Law School (now the Schulich School of Law). After receiving his law degree, Rocky worked for the Dalhousie Legal Aid Service, and later founded his own firm, B A "Rocky" Jones & Associates. In 1997 he successfully argued the ground-breaking case *R v RDS* before the Supreme Court of Canada, which set a precedent for race-related litigation and

contextualized judging.

### *Community honours*

Never one to seek the limelight for himself, the community has recognized Rocky's many contributions with honours that include: the Order of Nova Scotia; Doctor of Laws Honoris Causa (Guelph University), Meritorious Award of Excellence (The Black United Front of Nova Scotia); Distinguished Service Award (The Canadian Association of Black Lawyers); H Carl Goldenberg, QC Award and the Honourable GI Smith Trust Award (Schulich School of Law); Founders Award: The Transition Year Program (Dalhousie University); Community Involvement Award (The National Black Coalition of Canada); Race Relations Committee Award (The Nova Scotia Barristers' Society); Apex Community Award (Town of Truro); Wall of Honour (Nova Scotia Black Cultural Centre).

### *Community reflections*

"I first met Rocky in the mid 1990s. We were both at a meeting of social justice advocates in Ottawa. Rocky was an eloquent speaker - fierce, brave, smart. It was clear that he was loved and admired, and possibly was even revered, by those at the meeting. I thought to myself: here is a man I want to know more about. It was one of the great joys of finding my way to Halifax - having the chance to get to know Rocky a little bit better." - Dean and Weldon Professor of Law, Kimberley Brooks, Schulich School of Law

"There are not words to capture the breadth, depth, passion and love inherent in the life lived by our Elder, Dr. Burnley "Rocky" Jones. My heartfelt sympathies to his family, especially his wife and children at this time. I am just one of countless people who called him a mentor and friend. I can't remember when I first met him; I can't remember ever not knowing him. I do remember him encouraging me as a law student and throughout my career as he did so many others. Dr. Jones' work to improve all of our lives, and to show us our own worth and dignity, cannot be measured. I see it every time a potential applicant contacts the IB&M Initiative and talks about how Mr. Jones encouraged them to call - to go to law school. I see it in the courageous acts of our many community and legal activists who stand on his shoulders, and continue the path he forged. He taught us by example to work hard, play hard and love life. As far as I know Rocky never stopped working for African Nova Scotians. I don't think he could have. I don't know if it ever occurred to him. I don't know how to ever truly thank him - and his family for sharing him with us. There are not words, but I will start with thank you." Professor and Director of the Indigenous Blacks & Mi'kmaq Initiative, Michelle Williams

"I send my deepest condolences to the Jones family on the passing of Dr. Burnley Rocky Jones, Nova Scotia's civil rights icon. Dr. Jones was a champion of social justice and the Black struggle. This beloved son of Nova Scotia will be greatly missed. Rocky gave the inaugural lecture for the Distinguished James R. Johnston Lecture Series in January 2012. He spoke on the quest of African Nova Scotians for civil rights. Rocky has contributed to the local, national, and international struggle for Black rights. Over these past two years I have had the great pleasure to work with Dr. Jones. He exemplified compassion, strength, dedication, devotion, and commitment." - James Robinson Johnston Chair in Black Canadian Studies, Dr Afua Cooper

"The Transition Year Program wouldn't exist without Rocky's advocacy, action and knowledge. He fought hard for equity and justice. He knocked down the walls of exclusion and opened the doors

for all of us." - Professor and Director of the Dalhousie Transition Year Program/College of Continuing Education, Patricia Doyle-Bedwell

"Rocky Jones was one of those larger-than-life figures who filled a room with his character and personality. He was a passionate advocate for racial equality and justice and he will be sadly missed." - Professor and Yogis & Keddy Chair in Human Rights Law, and inaugural Director of the Indigenous Blacks & Mi'kmaq (IB&M) Initiative, Wayne MacKay

We would like to express our condolences to Rocky's family, friends, and all of the communities he has touched and inspired.