

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Honorary Degree Citation

The degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*,

conferred on Dr. Afua Cooper

Thursday, October 6, 2022

Madam Chancellor, it is indeed my honour to present Afua Cooper whose groundbreaking work as a scholar, author, poet and thought leader has catapulted Black and African Canadian history from obscurity. Her pioneering courses and research on slavery, Canadian Black Studies, Black education, women's studies and the African Diaspora courageously reminds us (and here I quote Dr. Cooper) that "to understand how the legacy of slavery is expressed today, we must comprehend the systems of power and oppression as well as the agency of white supremacy that slavery was premised on". Her work has focused international attention on issues of racism, inclusion and Black contributions in Canada and globally.

I am brimming with particular pride that Dr. Cooper is a compatriot. Born in Jamaica, Dr. Cooper immigrated to Canada in 1980 and earned a PhD from the University of Toronto. Today she is a leading figure in African-Canadian studies and is the principal investigator for the Canadian Heritage funded one-million-dollar research project, , an initiative that will produce a seismic shift in education about Canadian History. Dr. Cooper also led the panel that investigated Dalhousie University's relationship to slavery and race, and was the lead author of the subsequent report Lord Dalhousie's History on Slavery and Race. A Killam Research Chair at Dalhousie, her art and scholarship, which includes numerous exhibits on Black history, bridges the gap between academia and the wider world. Her 13 books span history, poetry and children's literature. One of her books, , broke new ground in the study of Canadian slavery, and was also shortlisted for a Governor General's Award.

Dr. Cooper was hailed as one of 25 women who are shaping the world by , and one of the most influential Canadians by Maclean's. She has received a myriad of honours including the Nova Scotia Human Rights Award, the J.B. Tyrrell Historical Medal, awarded by the Royal Society of Canada for outstanding work in the history of Canada, and was appointed Poet Laureate of Halifax from 2018-2020. For us in the Black community she is simply the best!

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