An Exploration of Anti-Black Racism in Alberta

"Black Unity is Black Community"
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Case Study:
Land Acknowledgement

In the spirit of respect, reciprocity and truth, we honour and acknowledge Moh’kinsstis and the traditional Treaty 7 territory and oral practices of the Blackfoot confederacy: Siksika, Kainai, Piikani as well as the Îyâxe Nakoda and Tsuut’ina nations. We acknowledge that this territory is home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3 within the historical Northwest Métis homeland. Finally, we acknowledge all Nations, indigenous and non, who live, work and play and help us steward this land, honour and celebrate this territory.

This sacred gathering place provides us with an opportunity to engage in and demonstrate leadership on reconciliation. Thank you for your enthusiasm and commitment to join our team on the lands of Treaty 7 territory.
The Black Inclusion Association (BIA) was founded to help achieve equity and social justice for all Black Calgarians. BIA is dedicated to dismantling the ingrained institutions that perpetuate racism in Canadian society by bolstering Black art, intellect, voices, and opportunities throughout the City of Calgary. The Black Inclusion Association is committed to the facilitation of community activities, the provision of equal opportunities, the combating of local institutional racism, and the creation of safe spaces for Calgary’s Black diaspora. In addition, BIA will be a median that connects Calgarians to a plethora of Black and Black-owned resources. Through these five primary goals, the Black Inclusion Association seeks to socially and structurally uplift Black peoples and Black communities in Calgary.
Founders

Ganiyat Sadiq
President

Keren Harrison
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Bohlale Bam
Secretary
What is Systemic Racism?

The Alberta Civil liberties Association distinguishes systemic racism from individual racism by defining it as the manifestation of institutional and structural racism. Institutional racism “derives from individuals carrying out the dictates of others who are prejudiced or of a prejudiced society,” while structural racism is composed of “[the] inequalities rooted in the system-wide operation of a society that excludes substantial numbers of members of particular groups from significant participation in major social institutions [1].” Systemic racism is perpetuated through various means such as education, hiring practices, and access to sports and recreational activities[1]. More broadly, systematic racism is the sustenance of inequitable conditions for Black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) relative to their Caucasian counterparts.
Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) face a multitude of barriers in Calgary’s socio-economic society. These barriers include a lack of representation in professional and leadership positions, racism, and discrimination. BIPOC individuals in Canada are overrepresented in underemployment rates, and are concentrated in low-level sales and clerical jobs\[7\]. Similarly, BIPOC are placed with part-time and temporary jobs, and earn less than other Canadians despite being more educated than average\[7\]. The systemic discrimination embedded in Calgary’s society and institutions create severe barriers of access, limited mobility and disproportionate concentrations of marginalized communities in substandard and increasingly segregated housing\[7\]. These systemic barriers lead to the racialization of poverty and other injustices’ uniquely experienced by BIPOCs individuals.
Local Institutional Racism in Calgary, AB

The Canadian Legacy of Systemic Racism and Bias Against BIPOC Communities

The persistence of systemic racism, and anti-BIPOC discrimination is not confined to the United States. In Canada, Black people are more likely to be racially profiled by the police, with Black Calgarians being twice as likely to be stopped than other citizens. Black Calgarians also represent 94% of hate crimes reported with Indigenous individuals experiencing 63% of such crimes[8]. Moreover, despite Black and Indigenous Calgarians representing 4% and 6% respectively of Calgary’s population, they represent 7% and 30% of Calgary’s prison population[8]. Within Calgary, Black individuals are twice as likely to be unemployed than the rest of the population. The disproportionality of the issues experienced by BIPOC consolidate the systematically racist tendencies, and biases perpetuated in Calgary[8]. The subsequent results of the racism faced by BIPOC individuals generate grave misconceptions that seek to continuously disadvantage BIPOC in Calgarian society. Such misconceptions have become the status quo.
Microaggressions and implicit racism are the “invisible” backbone of Calgarian society. Anti-racism training are programs aimed at teaching people and groups to recognize the ways that white supremacy and implicit bias are a part of their behaviour and how they shape institutions in society today[9]. Core aspects of anti-racism training address issues of white privilege, complicity, and how individual and collective action can be taken to combat systemic racism. Anti-racism training should be mandated in every career facet, corporations, and institutions. By confronting the entirety of white supremacy, implicit bias, and racial hegemony, the internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural nature of racism can be fully comprehended and understood.
In education, systemic racism can be found in complacent, West-centric school curricula. Though the Albertan education system is portrayed to be diverse and inclusive, it often fails to acknowledge or include the voices of BIPOC[1]. Canadian education continues to cater to middle-class white families, and remains a tale of “valiant” white people[1]. Adding BIPOC voices to this narrative does not change the narrative entirely, but rather allows people to justify their complacency because of such superficial inclusion. The Albertan education system proves West-centric as students graduate secondary education without an understanding of the unique plights and experiences of BIPOC in Canada and internationally. Furthermore, Albertan teachers are not taught to be anti-racist, making it extremely difficult for them to teach their students how to be anti-racist as one cannot teach what they do not know[1]. Multicultural and diversity approaches prove as surface level methods of anti-racism as they fail to counter the natural power imbalances that exist in classrooms[1].
Canada has seen a considerable increase in the number of Black people since the 1990s. Black people represent roughly 3.5% of Canada’s population with 1.3 million individuals[3]. Compared to the overall population in Canada, the Black population is young, with the majority being under twenty-five years old. Immigration has played an important role for Canada. For Black communities, immigration to Canada was at its highest between 2001 and 2010, wherein 180,855 Black immigrants landed in Canada[3]. Furthermore, since 2016, 52% of the Black population have claimed immigrant status, versus 44% being Canadian-born citizens[3].
People who identify as Black constitute a widely diverse population. In Canada, Black-identifying individuals are the most diverse group, with more than 200 ethnicities being represented. A Black individual can be: African, Caribbean, Black-Canadian, African-American, European national of African descent, Afro-Latino, of mixed origins such as biracial or multiracial, etc...[4]. According to Statistics Canada, the top ten countries of origin for Black individuals are Jamaica, Haiti, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Trinidad and Tobago, Cameroon, and the United States (see table below for numbers)[3].
### Migration Patterns of Canada's Black Diaspora

**Figure 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top countries of birth for Black immigrants, Canada, 2016</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>percent</th>
<th>percent of women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>623,195</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>122,550</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>92,040</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>41,415</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>30,960</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>50.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>25,300</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>24,385</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>22,475</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
<td>20,925</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>18,335</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>50.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>14,505</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td><strong>210,305</strong></td>
<td><strong>33.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>52.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.
Within the last century, immigration into the Prairies was not popular amongst Black communities. In Canada, Black individuals and families favor relocating to Ontario or Quebec due to the flexibility of languages, economic opportunities, ethnic and cultural diversity. According to Statistics Canada, Black communities have shown a preference for living in large urban areas as opposed to rural areas[3]. The largest population percentages of Black individuals can be found in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Gatineau, Edmonton, Calgary, and Halifax[3]. The booming oil industry in the Prairies, in particular Alberta, became a point of attraction for many immigrant groups, including Black people. In fact, the fastest growing Black population in Canada is in the Prairies, where it has more than quadrupled in size over 20 years, from 39,955 in 1996 to 174,655 people in 2016[3]. With this new wave of immigration, Black communities saw the potential of pursuing new opportunities to achieve economic prosperity in Alberta.
The Historical Exclusion of Black Albertans

The disinclusion of Black people is ingrained in Calgary’s history. The history of our civil rights activists and prominent Black leaders are not acknowledged in our education systems, workplaces, or social atmospheres. Calgarians readily accepted immigration (primarily from China) in the early 1900s to construct the Canada Pacific Railway[2]. When Black people migrated north from the United States to escape the persecution of Jim Crow, they were met with unexpected hostility from Canadian officials and civilians[2]. The Black diaspora has lived in segregated conditions, attended poorer schools, and had limited access to public resources since their arrival in Calgary[2].
Charles Daniels is a widely unknown historical figure (a key one nonetheless) who was the first Black man to pursue a lawsuit against a white man in Calgary. Bashir Mohamed cites Charles Daniels’s case as “the earliest example of a civil rights court case in Western Canada[2]”. He worked for the Canadian Pacific Railroad as an inspector for porters, which was one of the few occupations Black Canadians were allowed to pursue[2]. Black porters were prohibited from entering the white porter’s union, which ultimately forced them to create their own union called the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters[2].
Daniels bought two specific tickets to see King Lear with a friend in early February of 1914[2]. When he arrived at the show, his ticket was refused and he was told to sit in the section reserved for “colored” people[2]. The reason for his denial was that white people found Blacks “offensive” and did not want him in their midst as they enjoyed the play. Daniels protested such blatant racism, and pursued a legal case against the theater for $1,000 (approximately $20,000 today) [2]. Daniels’s actions made numerous Albertan newspaper headlines. The Bassano News printed: “CALGARY ‘N*****R’ KICKS UP FUSS—Wants to Attend Theatre With ‘White Folks’ But Management Says No[2].” The article headline highlights the fact that Daniels was especially brave for choosing to go to the courts in a place where legal discrimination was the norm[2]. Further, his actions took place far before the advent of the civil rights movement proving that Daniels was a revolutionary with goals of enfranchisement before many of his prominent successors[2].
Case Study: PinkFlamingo

At the end of July in 2020, city Councillor Evan Woolley submitted a proposal for four Black Lives Matter murals throughout Calgary to be led by a local group called Pink Flamingo[5]. The first mural was proposed to cover a 20-year-old mural downtown called “Giving Wings to the Dream[5]”. Extreme backlash, including personal threats and hatred directed towards members of Pink Flamingo forced the group to postpone the project until 2021[5].

The amplified plurality of anti-Black hatred directed towards the members of Pink Flamingo caused Calgary’s mayor Naheed Nenshi to condemn those people, expressing that such sentiments “have no place in this city[6].” Calgary’s city council approved a budget of $120,000 from its public art reserve directed towards projects that feature the Black Lives Matter movement[6]. Numerous local organizations wrote open letters in solidarity with Pink Flamingo, claiming that the mural was meant to be “a visual representation of inclusivity and love in this city,” but was met with a city polluted with “vitriol and violence[6].”

These cases evidence the persistence of the barriers that Black people in Calgary have faced historically, and continue to face contemporarily.
The conversation surrounding mental health has been constantly evolving over the last decade. Society has taken steps towards normalizing mental health in many ways. Many resources can be found through your doctor, school or place of employment. These resources are only the beginning of what is necessary to break down the stigma surrounding mental health. However, despite the copious amounts of resources offered to Canadians, there is a lack of resources made available for the Black community to address intersectionality of Black mental health issues. Likewise, immigrants are faced with situations that only increase their mental health issues, yet the resources are quite limited. Therefore, while the stigma surrounding mental health is slowly evolving, the Black community lacks the resources necessary to change that narrative completely.
Mental Health in the BIPOC Community

The experience one has with mental health is not universal. Despite this, there are many demographics that face similar issues. Immigration is one of the many factors that play into the amplification of mental health issues. Immigrants face an increased “risk of mental, emotion(al) and physical health difficulties[10].” Adapting to a new environment, language, values and traditions only amplifies and creates new issues for these individuals. Many immigrants with “low English-language proficiency” have limited options for resources as without any ethno-specific categories, they have none. It’s important to address how these issues disproportionately affect immigrants in Canada. The Black Inclusion Association aims to provide ethno-specific mental health resources currently missing from Calgarian society. Through the facilitation of mental health workshops, BIA will be able to connect the Black community with Black therapists and provide Black specific mental health resources. In the future, BIA aims to offer sliding scale therapy in order to enhance the accessibility of mental health resources in Calgary.
Works Cited


