

INTRODUCTION

Black life, complexities, nuances, and insights

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“Although slavery was abolished nearly 200 years ago, its effects continue to live on today. The legacy of systemic anti-Black racism is still embedded throughout our society, including in our institutions.”

This was Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s communiqué to Canadians on Emancipation Day, August 1, 2022. As such, one would expect that hearing such assertion from the Prime Minister, then under his leadership, we would have seen the unsatisfactory social, economic, educational, employment, and health conditions of Black Canadians being addressed knowing the historical “legacy of systemic anti-Black racism.” But it might be that such language is reflective of the current context in which worldwide protests following the murder of George Floyd (May 25, 2020) by a Minneapolis police officer in the US¹ and the racial reckoning that it generated, have resulted in a discourse of “Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization” (EDID). This discourse espoused by educational institutions, social agencies, business establishments, and government bureaucracies is taken to be an indication of their commitment to addressing the needs, interests, expectations, and aspirations of racialized members of society that they serve or are expected to serve.

Indigenous and Black Canadians are two racialized groups that have been identified as needing special or purposeful measures by which they would be able to gain access to employment, education, social, health and other services. Indeed, data have long shown that Indigenous and Black people continue to experience barriers to their participation in these areas; and as such, tend to

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¹Not be disregarded are the protests in the Greater Toronto Area pertaining to police involvement in the deaths of D’Andre Campbell (April 6, 2020) and Regis Korchinski-Paquet (May 27, 2020) in Canada.

be under-represented (Briggs, 2018; James, 2021; Thompson, 2018), even as legislation, policies, reports and programs like Multiculturalism (1971), Employment Equity (1984), Truth and Reconciliation (2015) and other such mechanisms are thought to signal governments', businesses', and institutions' commitment – and that of society generally – to accommodating and responding to the needs, concerns, issues and challenges of minoritized Canadians. But clearly, these mechanisms have failed to change the situation for these Canadians because if they did, there would be no need for today's education and employment initiatives to specifically identify Indigenous and Black people. In other words, if indeed, all minoritized or racialized people were benefitting from the promise of multiculturalism and Employment Equity policies and programs, then today's EDID initiatives would not have had to specially target Black people.

Why only in recent years – particularly during this period of racial reckoning – are Canadians prepared to recruit Black and Indigenous peoples into their establishments through EDID initiatives? A possible answer to this question might be that historically Canadians – socialized by their institutions – have maintained that unlike the United States, it is “culture” (typically attributed to being immigrants) and not “race” that accounts for the differences among ethnoracial group members. Underlying this notion is the colonial discourse of color-blindness structured on the whiteness of the European settler colonial project; and which has operated in the erasure, enslavement, cultural genocide, and segregation of Indigenous people (Clarke & Whitt, 2019; Dion, 2022; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006); as well as in the capture, enslavement, exclusion, segregation of African/Black people (Backhouse, 1999; Dei, 2017; Walker, 2008). Essentially, Canada's settler colonial project has contributed to a situation in which Black, like Indigenous, peoples have been subjected to a racialization system that “robbed them of their humanity and encased them in a culture of whiteness with education as a major instrument of assimilation” (James forthcoming); and for Black people that racialization is understood as anti-Black racism.

Addressing the formidable modality of anti-Black racism requires that we disaggregate the group of people that Canada refers to as “visible minority;” thereby giving consideration to the particular experiences of Black people; and in doing so, give attention to the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, language, dis/ability, and other identifications. It requires that we examine Black experiences as not solely determined through the lens of immigration (status or generation), which is often the case in many studies (Thésée & Carr, 2016). It also involves acknowledging the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism in several settings and domains: criminal justice system (Bernard & Smith, 2018; Samuels-Wortley, 2019), child welfare (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2020; Boatswain-Kyte et al., 2022), education (Briggs, 2018; James, 2021; Jean-Pierre, 2021; Kamanzi, 2021), health (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020), labor market (Hasford, 2016; Madibbo, 2021; Sall, 2021), and the environment (Waldron, 2018).

We take anti-Black racism to be significant to developing our understanding of the historical legacy of Canada's settler colonialism that has served to structure and maintain the stratification, hierarchical, exclusionary, and discriminatory systems which account for the lived experiences of Black people. As James (forthcoming) writes:

Systemic anti-Black racism is constitutive of three relational levels of racism – individual, institutional and societal/structural. Individual racism is the ideology, ideas, perceptions, and attitudes that are held of Black people leading to their racialization, marginalization, and discrimination they experience through their interaction with individuals. Institutional racism is largely in relation to the culture of society and enacted by the institutions' policies, regulations, and rules that result in differential practices toward, treatment of, and outcomes for Black people. And through

the laws, legislations, and policies of the State, which structure the all-pervasive culture of society, societal/structural racism structure, inform, and normalize hierarchies, privileges, marginalization, racialization, and oppression of Black people (James forthcoming).

Sociology provides a lens through which we can excavate the consequences of systemic anti-Black racism and how the history of Black people's early settlement in Canadian society as enslaved people continues to define them and dictate their presence and potential as citizens. And their race is often the basis upon which they are acknowledged, social roles are assigned, status is conferred, competency is determined, and agency is exercised (James, 2010; p. 285). As such, contributors to this special edition aim to move us beyond surface or emotional reactions to EDID claims and initiatives using research to build our understanding toward addressing anti-Black racism as it is lived and experienced in Canadian society (Jean-Pierre & James, 2020). The journal articles and the Committing Sociology essays in English and French, by Black scholars as sole or lead authors, reflect the heterogenous and nuances of Black life, as well as the complexity and heterogeneity of the Black experience in Canada.

OVERVIEW OF THE ARTICLES

The articles in this special issue touch upon various topics such as policy, immigration, education, and policing, spanning from national to local scopes, and reflecting realities from various provinces with theoretical, reflexive, and empirical approaches. The first article from Dr. Maureen Kihika presents an informed analysis of the policy of multiculturalism's failure to encompass and protect Black people's freedoms and rights. She argues that institutionalized multiculturalism obscures the social construction, subordination and marginalization of Black Canadians. In the second article, Dr. Oral Robinson examines critically the potential of Black affirming pedagogy in higher education. Drawing from antiracist, anticolonial and Blackcentricity lenses, he elaborates on how Black affirming pedagogies affirm Blackness, belonging, action for change, multiple sources of knowledge, solidarity, allyship, and the humanity of instructors and students in the classroom. In the third article, Dr. Natalie Deckard, Dr. Camisha Sibblis and Dr. Kemi Salawu Anazodo compare avoidance behaviors towards law enforcement based on immigration generation status among African Canadians. Using *Statistics Canada General Social Survey* data, their quantitative analysis shows how socialization in Canada is critical to understand the differences in distrust and avoidance towards law enforcement among different immigrant generations of Black Canadians. In the fourth article, Dr. Timothy Bryan examines police responses to racially motivated hate crimes that affect Black Canadians. Drawing from a qualitative study, he demonstrates how although Black Canadians continue to experience racial profiling and police excessive force, law enforcement' investigative efforts are lacking when Black people are victims of hate crimes.

The last two articles are in French. In the fifth article, Dr. Johanne Jean-Pierre's article reveals how critical hope shapes English-speaking and French-speaking Black Canadians' aspirations for change in education. Based on a bilingual qualitative study conducted in Nova Scotia, she shows how material hope, Socratic hope and audacious hope, key components of critical hope in education (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), are found among African Nova Scotians and Black immigrants' narratives alike. In the last article, Dr. Leyla Sall and collaborators discuss the experiences of Francophone Black immigrants who choose to join Canadian francophone minority communities across the country. Drawing from critical race theory and a qualitative

approach, they show that ethnic nationalism and the failure to address anti-Black racism contradict the official discourse of inclusivity. These articles exemplify the multiple ways of examining Black life, from policy, to pedagogy in higher education, to the relationship between law enforcement and Black Canadians, schooling, immigration, and the intersectionality of race and language.

COMMITTING SOCIOLOGY ESSAYS' HIGHLIGHTS

The Committing Sociology essays discuss Black solidarity, aesthetics, entrepreneurship, political sociology, and racialized labor conditions. The first contribution is a collective essay from the steering committee and co-founding members of the *Canadian Sociological Association* Black Caucus that discuss the origin and the necessary role of the CSA Black Caucus. Dr. Shirley Anne Tate, Canada Research Chair in Feminism & Intersectionality, is the author of the second essay which discusses how the social construction of beauty is not race-neutral but rather, that dominant beauty norms are shaped by anti-Blackness. The third contribution is authored by Dr. Amos Nkrumah where he discusses how anti-Black racism plays a role in the social interactions and business outcomes of Black immigrant entrepreneurs in the Prairies. In the fourth contribution, Dr. Prentiss A. Dantzler examines how Black political movements, such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), enable Black communities to re-imagine urban space and life. Similarly, Dr. Anne-Marie Livingstone focuses on political sociology and emphasizes the importance of studying racial politics, public institutions, and tangible initiatives that challenge racist policies and practices. In the last essay, Dr. Claudine Bonner takes a retrospective look at Black steelworkers' differential treatment in Nova scotia during the early 20th century due to anti-Black racism.

MOVING FORWARD

As the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) is unfolding, sociologists should take heed and even teach about the recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Council (2017) directed to the Canadian government. One of these recommendations stipulates the necessity of the collection of race-based data by government agencies in order to address existing gaps and patterns of inequality. Such data should not be used solely for descriptive or discrepancy analysis, but to inform tangible policies and practices across institutions. There are many topics that remain to be investigated theoretically and empirically from the point of view of Black Canadians regarding several areas in sociology (Jean-Pierre & McCready, 2019). Whether the research undertaken examines micro-, meso- or macro-level issues, has a regional or national scope, is conducted in English and/or in French, we advise that researchers work with and for the Black communities affected by their research. We should also interrogate the pedagogical strategies and resources, such as the assigned readings, that we mobilize to teach about Black Canadians in undergraduate and graduate courses. There is value in learning about society through the experiences and viewpoints of Black Canadians. In saying this, we are simply reiterating what sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois (1897) asserted more than a century ago, that Black people from Africa and the African diaspora have a unique contribution to make to humanity as a social group which no other group can make in their stead. Thus, beyond analyzing and challenging racism, we contend that there are critical insights that can illuminate our understanding of Canadian society and humanity through research that centers Black Canadian voices.

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