Original Paper

The Deep Roots of Anti-Black Institutional Racism in Canada

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Abstract

Based on a review of existing literature, this paper discusses Canadian evidences of anti-Black institutional racism, the organizational "standard operating procedures" that adversely affect minorities by design or intent ("systematic racism") or by the effect of exclusion or exploitation ("systemic racism"), with particular reference to education and law enforcement. This paper contends that anti-Black institutional racism in Canada is a superstructure whose core base is chattel slavery.

Keywords

racism, systemic, institutional, blacks, canada, anti-black, slavery

1. Introduction

When Derek Chauvin, a 44-year-old White Minneapolis police officer publicly killed George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man under police custody, by kneeling on Mr. Floyd's neck for about nine minutes on May 25, 2020, many Canadians were surprised that such a racist act occurred in an American city so close to the Canadian border. This surprise is not unusual, for a rather common belief in Canada is that racism is limited to the southern United States and that the closer to Canada one gets the less racism one finds. Indeed, shortly after the incidence in Minneapolis, Brenda Lucki, the Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) asserted that systemic racism was absent in her police force. It took a lot of backlash and video and other evidences of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous brutality by RCMP police officers for the Commissioner to eventually admit that systemic racism exists in her organization (CTV News, 2020).

Based on a review of existing literature, this paper seeks to highlight the deep roots of anti-Black institutional racism in Canada. The focus is on two highly impactful areas of life where evidences of anti-Black institutional racism in Canada can be vividly highlighted: education and law enforcement. For this paper, "Black" has to do with phenotype and sub-Saharan African roots. Isaacs (1975, p. 46)

argued that "body" is the most important of the six components of ethnic identification—body, name, language, history and origins, religion, and nationality—that he examined. He notes that physical features are crucial because, in general, unlike the other components of ethnic identity, biological characteristics cannot be readily altered.

2. What Is Institutional Racism?

The Black Lives Matter organization and its namesake movement have helped to call worldwide attention to issues of racism. What is racism? Fleras (2017, p. 81) offers the following working definition of racism: "Those ideas and ideals (ideology) that are embedded within individual attitudes, cultural values, institutional practices, and those structural arrangements that assert or imply the assumed superiority of one social group over another, together with the institutional power to put these perceptions into practice in ways that secure advantage for the mainstream but reinforce disadvantage for those racialized as different or inferior." Racism is manifested in many different tracts or sectors, one of which is institutional racism.

Fleras (2017, p. 90) discusses four sectors of racism in Canada: Interpersonal, Ideological, Infrastructural, and Institutional. Interpersonal racism includes the three subcategories of "hate racism" (exemplified by groups such as the Aryan Nation, the Ku Klux Klan, and neo-Nazi Skinheads), "polite racism" (exemplified by the use of coded language such as "those people" or "where are you from?"), and "subliminal racism" (exemplified by unconscious beliefs that are in stark contrast to a perpetrator's conscious thoughts or behaviors). Ideological racism has two subcategories: "everyday racism" and "normative racism". Everyday racism includes unconscious speech patterns, such as the color symbolism of "black = bad", that express micro-aggressions toward racialized minorities while normative racism "involves the perpetuation of racism by way of prevailing norms, values, standards, and beliefs" (Fleras, 2017, p. 100). Infrastructural racism is based on the premise that a society's constitutional order is invariably based on "values, agendas, and priorities" that reflect the interests of the dominant group; for example, the Canadian value of individualism (as opposed to communitarianism) has European origins and favors the dominant White majority. Institutional racism, the subject of this paper, is "about organizational values and practices that create disproportionate outcomes for racialized minorities both in the workplace and in the community at large" (Fleras, 2017, p. 94).

Institutional racism resides in organizational "standard operating procedures" that adversely affect minorities by *design or intent* ("systematic racism") or by the *effect* of exclusion or exploitation ("systemic racism"). Thus, for example, the use of Eurocentric textbooks and curricula in schools represents institutional racism. Individual perpetrators of institutional racism may not have racist attitudes themselves; in fact, they may be personally against racism. Institutional racism is at play whenever racist policies or procedures are enforced, even when the enforcer of such policies or procedures is an honest anti-racist.

3. Some Examples of Institutional Racism

Henry (2019) provides an excellent summary of anti-Black discrimination in Canada in the areas of education, housing, employment, military service, commercial establishments (such as theatres, barbershops, restaurants and inns, recreational facilities, and cemeteries), transportation, and immigration. While some may question whether the discrimination in the areas underlined by Henry (2019) are on-going and result from systemic anti-Black racism, a recent land claim ruling by the Nova Scotia Supreme Court highlighted the effect of systemic racism on limited property ownership and intergenerational cycles of poverty among Blacks.

The case before the Nova Scotia Supreme Court involved Christopher Downey, a 66-year-old Black man who sought legal title for a parcel of land in North Preston, Nova Scotia on which his great-grandfather first settled in 1913. Fortunately for the Black community, the court ruling sought to correct an issue that dates back to the 18th century when Loyalists and other Black and White settlers were provided plots of land with a significant difference: Whites were allotted fertile plots and were given legal titles while Blacks were allotted rocky, infertile plots and were not given legal titles. Justice Jamie Campbell indicated that racism "is embedded within the systems that govern how our society operates. That is a fundamental historical fact and an observation of present reality" (CBC, July 18, 2020).

Given the historically low view of Blacks in Canada, it is not surprising that Canadian governments have attempted to exclude Blacks from the country and/or to subjugate Blacks already in the country. The attempts to exclude Blacks have included preventing the entry of Blacks through immigration policies, procedures, and practices while the attempts at subjugation have been rooted in residential segregation (sometimes referred to as "redlining"). Since the ultimate form of exclusion and segregation has taken the form of chattel slavery, serious discussions of the roots of anti-Black racism in Canada tend to start with a discussion of slavery.

4. Slavery

Clairmont and Magill's (1974, p. 41) observation about Blacks in Nova Scotia appears true of Blacks in the rest of Canada: "The groundwork for the subordination of the blacks as a people in Nova Scotia was laid by the early existence of a slave society." Although the situation of Blacks in Canada was dissimilar from that of their American counterparts, this dissimilarity can be attributed partly to the fact that plantation-style slavery was unsuited to the form of agriculture practiced in Canada (McClain, 1979, p. 12).

Slavery was practiced in Canada for at least 204 years. Slavery was practiced in Canada at least from 1629—when Olivier Le Jeune, a Black African man, was sold in the first recorded slave sale in Canada—till 1833 when slavery was officially abolished. This means that the first Black person in Canada, Matthew Da Costa who arrived with the Champlain Expedition of 1605, was not a slave or, at least was not officially sold or bought in Canada. In any case, by 1759 there were 3,604 slaves in New France (now Quebec), of whom 1,132 were Blacks and the remainder Indigenous peoples (Macionis & Gerber, 2005, p. 346).

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During Canada's slavery era, some Blacks were allowed to live on the margins as free—especially when doing so made Canadians look better than Americans. In 1783 (before the general abolition of slavery in Canada in 1833) about 3,500 Black United Empire Loyalists—Black slaves who fought on the British side during the American Revolution—moved from the United States to freedom in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (Macionis & Gerber, 2005, p. 346). From about 1840 to 1865 the famed Underground Railroad, led by "conductors" such as Harriet Tubman and Josiah Henson, brought escaped American slaves to freedom in Canada. By 1865, between 30,000 and 40,000 Black slaves had escaped via the Underground Railroad to freedom in Canada (Macionis & Gerber, 2008, p. 362). Nevertheless, there is little doubt that slavery was as entrenched in the Canadian experience as it was in the American (Tulloch, 1975; Clairmont & Magill, 1974). For example, before the arrival of the Black Loyalists in 1783, almost all Blacks in Canada were slaves; in contrast, the earliest Blacks in the United States had equal social status as their white counterparts (Bennett, Jr., 1962; Stampp, 1972). Furthermore, not only did slavery last longer in Canada than it did in the northern United States, but many runaway slaves escaped from Canada to the New England states (Winks, 1968, p. 288).

After the American Civil War (1861-1865) the Canadian government, in an attempt to appease the general population, actively discouraged the settlement of Blacks in Canada by introducing a policy which drastically limited the immigration of Blacks (Brym & Lie, 2009, p. 215). Even in 1966 when the Canadian government introduced a policy that allowed the admission of a few Black Caribbean nationals to work on Canadian farms, the policy was clearly racist. Government officials justified the 1966 farm workers program "by arguing that Black workers were racially suited to back-breaking labour under the sun, but racially unsuited to the cold Canadian winters" (Satzewich, 2004, p. 251).

Such was the impact of Canada's immigration policies that the majority of Canada's 1.2 million contemporary Blacks (about 3.5% of the country's population) are of Caribbean origins and immigrated to Canada only after the introduction in 1967 of the "point system" immigration policy that allowed the non-sponsored immigration of skilled persons regardless of national origins (Steckley, 2020, pp. 242-243). One consequence of the relative recency of the immigration of most Canadian Blacks is that the Black community is at an early stage of its life-cycle. Accordingly, issues such as Black identity are not yet fully crystallized in the experiences of many Canadian Blacks. Successful community building relies heavily on the successful dissemination of relevant image-enhancing information. Unfortunately, for Blacks, the information from Canada's primary socialization institutions—education and law enforcement—is counterproductive to successful Black community building.

5. Education

General education on race in Canada pretends that Blacks do not exist. Because "official Canada" consists predominantly of and was designed for White Europeans, Canadians have historically been willfully blind toward issues of race (Halli & Driedger, 2000, p. 12). Thus, for example, while the United States has struggled with how to refer to its Black population—colored (1940s and 1950s), Afro-American (1950s), negro (1960s), black (1970s), and now African-American—it has always seen race as significant. In contrast, Canada has concentrated on ethno-cultural-religious-linguistic and national origins; there have been no official struggles to refer to Blacks in any particular way. When Canada's 1971 Multiculturalism Policy created a need to obtain information on Canadians who were supposed to benefit directly from the policy, a made-in-Canada expression surfaced in 1971: "visible minority" (Wargon, 2000, p. 26). The waste basket category of "visible minority" is so broad that it includes all groups and individuals who do not identify themselves as White.

School curricula have historically been biased against Blacks. Textbooks did not even mention Blacks, "except in humorous and menial contexts". Most textbooks did not mention that Canada permitted slavery until 1833 or that racially segregated schools existed in Canada until the 1960s (Winks, 2008, pp. 25-27).

It is difficult to find a textbook used in any level of schooling in Canada that is overtly Afro-centric; indeed, it is almost impossible to find a textbook that is not Eurocentric. Even sociology textbooks used in universities have historically been Eurocentric and androcentric; for example, it is only in recent years that some textbooks have bothered to include Blacks, such as W.E.B. DuBois, and females, such as Harriet Martineau, among the pioneers of the discipline. In the immediate aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, some Blacks have been quite vocal about the fact that curricula in mainstream cosmetology programs in high schools do not include the care of Black people's skin and uniquely curly hair (Global News, June 23, 2020).

Even science courses and programs are not value-neutral. Henry and Tator (2010, pp. 202-203) summarize systemic racism in the sciences as follows: "Science classes in educational institutions also provide opportunities for fostering racism in the classroom. Bias is reflected in the omission of racialized people from most scientific texts; their images and contributions to scientific development are usually absent." The use of Eurocentric textbooks and curricula represents institutional racism.

Beyond institutional racism in the form of Eurocentric textbooks and curricula, there is the fact that racially segregated school systems existed in Canada from 1850 to 1965—115 years. Racially segregated school systems were introduced as early as 1850 in Nova Scotia and Ontario, the two provinces that had the greatest number of Black residents (Winks, 2008, p. 25).

Since most Canadian provinces had well-established systems of separate schools along religious lines (Protestant and Roman Catholic), it was relatively straightforward for legislatures to establish and maintain racially separate schools. But there was a thorny issue: Black schools were in very poor operational and infrastructural conditions. The separate schools were not at all equal to the mainstream

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public schools. Black schools often lacked teachers and appropriate equipment and were sometimes located in uninsurable, dilapidated buildings (Winks, 2008, pp. 26-27).

Black schools existed in various parts of Canada either by law or due to patterns of residential segregation for up to 115 years. An example of a Black school that existed primarily by virtue of residential segregation, was the Grades 1 to 10 school in Amber Valley, Alberta which was eventually closed in the 1960s (Winks, 2008, p. 27). Henry (2019) aptly summarizes the background factors in the rise of Black schools in Canada:

> Ontario and Nova Scotia were the only provinces to legislate racially segregated schools. However, in other provinces including Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, it was acceptable practice for White residents to deny Black families access to local public schools. Intimidation was used to discourage Black parents from sending their children to local public schools, or to force Black families to establish their own schools.

The work to abolish racially segregated schools in Canada was spearheaded primarily by the organizational muscles of the United Church of Canada and by liberal-minded Whites and militant Black leaders. Racially segregated schools were abolished in Canada in the mid-1960s because the times had changed. As Winks (2008, p. 27) puts it: "No longer was it good Christianity, good politics, good international affairs, good image-building, good human relations, or even good sense to discriminate against Negroes, especially in a nation which so prided itself on its moral superiority to the United States."

Positive changes in the maltreatment of Blacks in Canada have been typically achieved through non-violent, peaceful means. But there was one notable exception: the Sir George Williams affair, a protest that occurred at Sir George Williams University (now incorporated into Concordia University) in Montreal from January 29 to February 11, 1969. The protest, which involved hundreds of mostly White students, was in response to the failure of the university's administration to respond appropriately to charges of racism levelled in the spring of 1968 against a biology professor, Dr. Anderson, by six Caribbean students. The otherwise peaceful occupation of the university's computer center turned into a violent incident on February 11, 1969 when the university administration enlisted Montreal Police riot squad to end the occupation. What ensued was disastrous: the computer center was set on fire which resulted in up to two million dollars damage and students were arrested as they ran out of the occupied building. The Sir George Williams affair revealed carefully-concealed racism in Canadian society. For example, as the computer center burned, onlookers chanted "burn, n--, burn!" and "Let the n-- burn!" (Lambert, 2016). Furthermore, while in police custody, the police separated the students by race.

6. Law Enforcement

The law is not neutral. Canadian law was overtly anti-Black in many ways: it favored the enslavement of Blacks, limited educational opportunities for Blacks, prevented Black participation in public life, and restricted Black immigration (Henry & Tator, 2010, p. 125). Thus, "the law that is the foundation of the practices and policies exercised by the courts is itself racist because the principles germane to its interpretation were developed during an era in which people of colour and other disadvantaged groups were barred from participating in society and the justice system" (Henry & Tator, 2010, p. 125).

Since most people's initial contact with the justice system is the police and this contact often impacts the subsequent developments and decisions regarding a case (Henry & Tator, 2010, p. 127), discussions about the law often include discussions about the police. It is important to discuss anti-Black racism in policing partly because no "single area of Canadian life has perhaps caused more concern and more persistent tension and conflict than the relationship between the police and people of colour" (Henry & Tator, 2010, p. 151). A 2018 report by the Ontario Human Rights Commission stated that while Blacks comprised 8.8 per cent (about nine per cent) of Toronto's population in 2016, they comprised 70 percent of the cases of fatal shootings by police between 2013 and 2017. The report also stated that Blacks (specifically, Black men) were "overrepresented in everything from investigations into use of force and sexual assault by police, to inappropriate or unjustified searches and charges" (The Globe and Mail, 2018).

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) recently published some evidence from its Deadly Force database, which can be summarized as follows: the number of cases of fatal police encounters with citizens has been increasing over the past 20 years, most victims suffered from mental illness or substance abuse, and Black and Indigenous people are over-represented among the victims of police fatalities (CBC, July 24, 2020). In particular, the CBC found that Blacks accounted for 8.63 percent of deaths and 2.92 percent of Canada's population (CBC, July 24, 2020).

Level-headed discussions of policing in Canada tend to agree that visible minorities, particularly young Black men, are over-represented as victims of police brutality. The main area of disagreement is whether police targeting of minorities is a consequence of a few "bad apples" in the police organizations or of a "rotten barrel" or "rotten tree" that produces bad apples. If a few "bad apples", then what we have is individual racism; if a "rotten barrel" then what we have is institutional racism.

Whites tend to favor the "bad apples" thesis while Blacks tend to favor the "rotten barrel" thesis—even in cases that appear to be clear-cut incidents of racial profiling. An example is in the area of "carding", the police practice of sometimes stopping a person who is not under arrest and entering the person's information in a database. The empirical evidence is that, given their population, Blacks in the Toronto area are "carded" at three times the rate that would be expected were the "carding" random. This evidence is seen by some Whites as confirmation of the existence of rogue police officers and/or of Black involvement in suspicious behaviors. In contrast, Blacks tend to see the same "carding" evidence

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as confirmation of racial profiling: police stopping "who they see rather than what they see" (Fleras, 2017, p. 58).

The scholarly position on police anti-Black racism in Canada points to police culture—including the "thin blue line" mindset which distinguishes between "us" and "them" (Henry & Tator, 2010, p. 153). In the police culture view, police anti-Black racism exists independently of specific racist policies within police organizations. Racism is, therefore, "not so much the personal beliefs of individual police officers, but evidence of a strongly developed culture and value system within an organization that produces, supports, and reinforces racial bias and discrimination" (Henry & Tator, 2010, p. 152). Put differently, some people join police organizations without overt racial biases but develop such biases as a result of being police officers. Socialization within police organizations, on-the-job experiences, and interaction with fellow police officers combine to create biases that lead to anti-Black behaviors. Thus, "the racism of police culture is embedded in routine practices such as joking, banter and shared pastimes like off-duty drinking, that are not intrinsically racist, but which succeed in excluding ethnic minority officers and reinforcing stereotypes" (Henry & Tator, 2010, p. 153). The racism of police culture is, thus, a textbook example of institutional racism.

7. Conclusion

This paper contends that anti-Black institutional racism is a superstructure whose base is chattel slavery. Institutional racism exists in Canada but it is often so hidden that even regular perpetuators do not necessarily notice its existence. This paper discussed Canadian evidences of anti-Black institutional racism, the organizational "standard operating procedures" that adversely affect minorities by *design or intent* ("systematic racism") or by the *effect* of exclusion or exploitation ("systemic racism"), with particular reference to education and law enforcement. In particular, since Canada was designed for Whites, school curricula have either excluded Blacks or have presented Blacks in negative ways. For its part, law enforcement has been biased against Blacks both by supporting slavery and, in more recent times, by having an anti-Black subculture exemplified in the "thin blue line" mindset. In short, racism is baked into Canadian society, and education and law enforcement are two key areas where institutional racism negatively affects the lives of Black Canadians.

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