

Understanding Racism

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Tips for Teaching Controversial Issues

The teaching of value-laden issues has generated much controversy. There is some basic consensus on the fundamental moral and ethical values in our society and that these values can be taught in a meaningful way.

It is assumed in Canadian Studies that there are fundamental values on which there is agreement. It is also assumed that there are many disagreements and that students need to learn to deal with controversy. The social studies and history curricula provide students with learning experiences that will help them identify some of the fundamental value positions of society and how these arose. This curriculum deals with controversy, even invites it. However, it does not suggest that any belief is as good as any other belief. Therefore, this curriculum makes no attempt to be objective in the sense of being value free.

Canadian Studies gives students opportunities to examine controversial issues. Debating these issues will provide students with the opportunity to apply concepts and higher order thinking skills in organizing, interpreting and communicating information meaningfully. In this process, students can begin to understand the role of values as the basis for making inferences, that values provide us with evaluative criteria, and that we depend upon the traditions of Canadian society to provide us with guidelines. These criteria include: human dignity, basic rights and responsibilities as defined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and respect of, and tolerance for, individual differences.

There are many methods to teach controversial issues in the classroom. As these issues touch personal beliefs and trigger emotional reactions, these methods are sometimes difficult to conduct in an orderly fashion.

The following ideas may assist teachers:

- Recognize the general legitimacy of controversy as a part of society, and that students must learn to discuss the issues and problems presented.
- Establish ordered ways of proceeding: discussions, debates, take a stand, continuum, mediation, etc. Create and agree on effective rules.
- Concentrate on evidence and valid information.
- Represent the opposing positions accurately and fairly.
- Make sure to clarify the issue, so that everyone understands where there is a disagreement and where there is agreement (to avoid simultaneous monologues).
- Identify core issues.
- Avoid the use of slogans.
- Talk about concrete issues before raising the discussion to a level of abstraction.
- Allow the students to question your position.
- Admit doubts, difficulties, and weaknesses in your position.
- Teach understanding by re-stating the perspective of others. Have participants paraphrase what they hear to gain this skill.
- Demonstrate respect for all opinions.
- Establish means of closure: examine consequences and consider alternatives.

Understanding Racism

Note to Teachers:

This lesson is intended as a general introduction to the concept of racism and may be used in the context of specific Civics or Grade 10 History content. Applicable areas include:

- Grade 10 History: Immigration, Residential Schools, treatment of “enemy aliens” during World War One, internment of Japanese-Canadians in World War II, Aboriginal Rights Movement.
- Grade 10 Civics: Unit 1- The Good Citizen (conflict resolution methods, democracy, decision-making), Unit 2 - The Informed Citizen (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms), Unit 3 - The Active Citizen (interest groups, bringing about change within the democratic system), Unit 4 - The Global Citizen (Human Rights, War and Armed Conflict, the Indigenous Citizen).

Background Information

The following reference materials have been provided for teacher use:

- “Historical Context: The Legacy of Racism in Canada”
- “Myths and Misconceptions: Aboriginal Peoples”
- “Race”
- “Modern Racism in Canada”

Resources Required:

Student handout “On the Outside”
Flipchart paper and markers
Student handout “Stop Racism” poster campaign

Purpose:

To provide students with an opportunity to define the concept of racism in a way that is meaningful for them and to explore their own feelings and experiences with racism in a safe environment.

To provide students with an understanding of the historical context of racism in Canada.

ACTIVITY

1. Introduce topic by asking students how many people in the room are wearing Nike shoes or have blue eyes, etc. All those who meet the criteria come up to the front of the room. Have students discuss why you asked those people to come forward. Ask those at the front of the room how it feels to be singled out. Tell students that those at the front of the room will receive a treat because of their “special” status. Ask the rest of the class how that makes them feel. Discuss the concept of the privileged versus the unprivileged in society.
2. Distribute Student handout “**On the Outside**” and have students complete the questions in sections 1 and 2 individually.
3. In groups of 2 or 3, students are presented with a piece of flipchart paper with the word ‘*racism*’ written in the centre. Instruct the students to brainstorm words that they associate with racism. When complete, post flipcharts on the blackboard.
4. Lead a discussion in which students observe the similarities and differences between the various groups’ webs. Use this information to generate one whole class definition of racism.
5. Introduce historical context of racism in Canada (refer to teacher resources for background information). Prepare an overhead or Power Point slide show to outline the historical context of racism in Canada.
6. Have students refer back to handout “**On the Outside**” and complete question #1 under “Objects of Discrimination”. These may be shared with the class if the teacher deems this appropriate.
7. Introduce poster assignment (refer to handout) and provide materials.

Stop Racism Poster Campaign

Task

Create a poster individually or with a partner for the purpose of promoting the end of racism in our school and/or community. The target audience of the poster is teenagers in Thunder Bay.

Details

- The poster will be completed on 11X17 paper.
- A “catchy”, appropriate slogan must be featured on the poster.
- Pictures may be drawn by hand, computer generated, or cut from magazines.
- Pictures, symbols, and words must appeal to the target audience.
- The message of the poster must be clear.
- There must be evidence of some thought about strategies for stopping racism.

Evaluation Rubric for Stop Racism Poster

Name: _____

	Criteria	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Score
Poster - Thinking/Inquiry	Has the student thought about and completed the task in a creative manner	- creative thinking skills have been utilized with limited effectiveness (10)	- creative thinking skills have been utilized with moderate effectiveness (12)	- creative thinking skills have been utilized with considerable effectiveness (14-16)	- creative thinking skills have been utilized with a high degree of effectiveness (17-20)	/20
Poster - Communication	Were a title, pictures and colour done accurately and neatly?	- a title, visuals and colour have been done with minimal accuracy and neatness (10)	- a title, visuals and colour have been done with some accuracy and neatness (12)	- a title, visuals and colour have been done with considerable accuracy and neatness (14-16)	- a title, visuals and colour have been done with thorough accuracy and neatness (17-20)	/20
Poster - Knowledge/ Understanding	Did the visual material accurately depict 'Stop Racism'	- visual material did not accurately depict the theme 'Stop Racism' (10)	- visual material depicted the theme 'Stop Racism' with some accuracy (12)	- visual material depicted the theme 'Stop Racism' with considerable accuracy (14-16)	- visual material depicted the theme 'Stop Racism' in a thoroughly accurate manner (17-20)	/20
Total						/60

Comments:

On the Outside

In groups of 2 or 3, please answer the following questions and record answers on a separate piece of paper.

1. **Ask students if any of them has ever been kept out of a group that they wanted to be a part of.**
 - How did they feel?
 - Why do you think you were kept out?
 - How did you want to act?
 - How did you actually act?

2. **Ask students if any of them has ever kept someone out of a group and why they have kept that someone out of the group.**
 - How do you think that person felt?
 - How did you feel keeping the other person out?
 - Should everyone be allowed to be part of every group?
 - Are there instances (or reasons) when it is justified keeping someone out of a group you might be a part of? (give examples)
 - What are some justifiable reasons? (Are there really justifiable reasons?)
 - What sorts of reasons are not justifiable?

Objects of Discrimination:

1. **Generate a list by identifying all the different types of people you can think of who are discriminated against in our society.**
2. **Write your list on a piece of chart paper.**
3. **Present your list to the class.**

1.4 Historical Context: The Legacy of Racism in Canada

http://www.ohrc.on.ca/english/publications/racism-and-racial-discrimination-policy_1.shtml

A starting point of a policy on racial discrimination and racism is to provide a brief historical context of racial discrimination and racism in Canada. We must be aware of the events of the past in order to address contemporary manifestations of racial discrimination and racism. A review of the history of racism reveals that Canada has made progress. For example, laws such as the *Canadian Bill of Rights*, the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* have been enacted to provide protection against racism and racial discrimination. However, much work remains to be done.

It is no coincidence that communities which historically experienced racial discrimination continue to be placed on the lowest rungs of the social, economic, political and cultural ladder in Canada. The legacy of racism in Canada has profoundly and lastingly permeated our systems and structures. As such, it must be acknowledged in any policy statement, particularly when considering such matters as institutional or systemic discrimination, inclusive design, barrier removal and methods to respond to racism. What follows is a brief, non-exhaustive historical overview to promote an understanding of the context of racism and racial discrimination in Canada.[*] Although many of the events described may appear to be in the distant past, it is important to note that there are many contemporary examples of racism.

Aboriginal

Historically, policies and practices towards Aboriginal persons [18] have been based on assumptions that they are inferior and incapable of governing themselves. Other patterns of interaction were characterized by a desire to assimilate, displace or segregate Aboriginal persons, or to suppress Aboriginal cultures. While recent decades have seen progress in addressing Aboriginal rights in Canada, much remains to be done as illustrated by outstanding issues regarding land rights, residential schools restitution, self-governance, as well as other issues identified in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* and, recently, the *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people*.

The *Indian Act*, first enacted in 1876, gave the federal government control over “Indian” political structures, landholding patterns, resource and economic development and almost every important aspect of Aboriginal peoples’ lives. Just a few of the racist features of the *Act* included prohibiting land ownership, rules on electing leaders, denial of the right to vote, prohibiting leaving reserves without a pass, preventing ceremonial festivals and events, and determining who was an “Indian”.

Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their homes and communities and sent to residential schools operated by missionary societies where they were forbidden to speak their language, to practice their traditions and customs and to learn about their history. They were often given an inferior education and many experienced malnutrition, overcrowding, illness, harsh discipline and sexual abuse. Many of these schools were closed in the 1960s, with the last one closing in 1988.

African

The enslavement of Africans, racial segregation and discrimination are also part of Canada's history. Black slavery was actively practiced in Canada. Between 1628 and the early 1800s, approximately 3000 people of African origin came to Canada and most were held as slaves. In 1793, the Parliament of Upper Canada (now Ontario) under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe passed an *Act to prevent the further introduction of Slaves, and to limit the term of contracts for Servitude within this Province, the first act to limit slavery in the British Empire*. Ontario became a destination for those fleeing slavery in the United States via the "underground railroad". In 1833 the British Parliament's *Emancipation Act* abolished slavery in all parts of the Empire, including Ontario, but its legacy remained. Prejudice and discrimination would still constrict the opportunities of most Canadians of African ancestry.

African Canadians were excluded from schools, churches, restaurants, hospitals and public transportation. They were restricted to menial, low-paying and exhausting labour. Many African Canadians lived in segregated communities in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Ontario. In addition, residential segregation was perpetuated through racially restrictive covenants attached to deeds and leases. The Ontario legislature established segregated schools, and legal challenges to these failed. The legislation remained on books as late as 1964.

Prior to human rights statutes, court challenges to address racial discrimination were largely unsuccessful. In 1939, the Supreme Court of Canada rejected a lawsuit for humiliation brought by Fred Christie, a Black man who was refused service by a Montreal tavern. The Court declined to comment on the racial discrimination, instead concluding that freedom of commerce allowed a merchant to deal with the public in any way he may choose.

Chinese

The experience of Chinese Canadians is similarly tainted by a history of racism. In the 1880s, labourers were recruited from China to take on the dangerous work of building the railway through the mountains. After being subjected to deplorable working conditions, once their labour was no longer needed, they were seen as a threat to society and an "alien race" and subjected to intense racial discrimination.

Laws were passed to limit Chinese immigration. The 1885 *Chinese Immigration Act* imposed a \$50 "head tax" on all Chinese persons entering Canada. In 1903, this amount was raised to \$500, a prohibitive amount of money. In 1872, the right to vote in provincial and municipal elections was also taken away from Chinese Canadians in British Columbia (Japanese Canadians and South Asian Canadians were also disenfranchised in 1895 and 1907 respectively). Chinese Canadians were also subjected to discriminatory laws and policies affecting their ability to own property, operate businesses, serve the public and enter certain professions. "In the interest of the morals of women and girls", laws were passed to prevent Chinese men from employing White women.

Many are familiar with the experience of Japanese Canadians in World War II. Twenty-three thousand Japanese Canadians living on the west coast of British Columbia were sent to relocation and detention camps in isolated areas in the interior of British Columbia, southern Alberta, Manitoba and northern Ontario. In addition to other violations and deprivations, Japanese Canadians were stripped of their property, businesses and savings. Towards the end of the war, Japanese Canadians were threatened with further expulsion. They were given the option for "dispersal" to towns east of the Rocky Mountains, or outright

“repatriation” to Japan (by 1947, 4000 Japanese Canadians, half of whom were Canadian born, had left Canada). The Canadian government did not release them until 1947 and it took a further two years before they were able to resettle on the west coast. In 1988, twelve thousand surviving Japanese Canadians were paid \$20 000 each as compensation and a formal apology was issued by Parliament.

Other groups have suffered from racism in Canada’s history. For example, South Asian Canadians were viewed with the same racial bias, hostility and resentment as was directed at other racialized groups and they had similar experiences with discriminatory laws, such as legislation to control their economic and social mobility and to remove their right to vote.[35] Like others, they were adversely impacted by immigration laws that preferred immigrants from northern and western European countries. In 1914 a shipload of 400 would-be immigrants from India were denied entry at Vancouver. They were held aboard the ship for nearly three months before being forced to return to India.

Islamophobia

A contemporary and emerging form of racism in Canada has been termed “Islamophobia”. Islamophobia can be described as stereotypes, bias or acts of hostility towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general. In addition to individual acts of intolerance and racial profiling, Islamophobia leads to viewing Muslims as a greater security threat on an institutional, systemic and societal level.

Jewish

Jewish Canadians have been subjected to anti-Semitism and legalized discrimination. “None is too many” was the response given by a high level Canadian government official when asked how many Jews should be accepted as immigrants, at the time of the Nazi persecution of Jews. Signs posted along the Toronto beaches stated, “No Dogs or Jews Allowed”. Many hotels and resorts had policies prohibiting Jews as guests.[38] There were restrictions on where Jewish persons could live or buy property. In 1951, a Jewish man challenged one such restrictive covenant preventing property from being sold to anyone of “the Jewish, Hebrew, Semitic, Negro or coloured race or blood”. The Supreme Court of Canada declared the covenant void on the basis it was overly broad.

More recently, immigration policies and practices have been informed by and have contributed to racism in Canada. A discussion of immigration is beyond the scope of this policy; however, at various times, Canada’s immigration policies and practices have either directly or indirectly made it easier for some groups (such as northern and western Europeans), and more difficult for racialized groups, to gain entry.

The history of racism has had an enduring effect on racialized communities. For example, paternalistic and assimilationist policies and practices toward Aboriginal persons have had a devastating impact. Many Aboriginal persons experience profound disadvantage in all spheres of life including housing, employment, health and education. Aboriginal communities continue to struggle to assert their land and treaty rights. Racialized groups can all trace their continued experience of marginalization to the legacy of racism in Canada.

*This summary is intended to concisely outline and show the commonalities of some of the most significant events of racism in Canadian history. It is not, and cannot be, a detailed or exhaustive review of the experience of every racialized community nor should it be considered a basis for comparing the degree of racism suffered by various communities.

RACE

All human beings belong to one species: Homo Sapiens. The concept of race stems from the idea that the human species can be naturally subdivided into biologically distinct groups. Race has been used to describe people who were classified together on the basis of genetic or physical similarities—such as skin colour, shape of eyes, hair texture—and were also frequently thought to share cultural and social traits.

In practice, however, scientists have found it impossible to separate humans into clearly defined races and most scientists today reject the concept of biological race. Nevertheless, race persists as a powerful social, cultural, and historical concept used to categorize people on perceived differences in physical appearance and behaviour. Some have felt that it is necessary to put the word into inverted commas in order to make it clear that these are social distinctions being referred to rather than biological ones, and to distance themselves from the original meaning of the term.

A racialized minority group can be defined by examining the relationship between the group and the majority society. If the relationship is one of subordination enforced by the perception of racial difference, the group is racially subordinated.

The term racism is useful as a shorthand way of categorizing the systematic mistreatment experienced by people of colour, but should not mislead us into supposing the human beings belong to biologically different species. Systemic racism is institutionalized discrimination; for example, hiring and promotion procedures or entrance requirements may have the effect of excluding various racial groups and supporting members of the dominant group.

RACISM refers to a set of beliefs that asserts the superiority of one racial group over another (at the individual as well as institutional level), and through which individuals or groups of people exercise power that abuses or disadvantages others on the basis of skin colour and racial or ethnic heritage. At the same time, discriminatory practices protect and maintain the advantageous position of the dominant group(s).

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Myths & Misconceptions: Aboriginal Peoples

Racism is first and foremost a condition of ignorance. Minds are easy to mould, and, with a lack of information, it is often easy to be misled. The first step in eliminating racism is shedding light on false perceptions commonly held. While people have the freedom to think what they want, there are some misguided and destructive ideas that need the truth. You can believe in these myths if you want, but you can also believe that the Earth is flat, the sun revolves around the Earth...

MYTH: the injustices done to Aboriginal peoples are a thing of the past, and are not an issue of modern times.

Up until the 1970s, many First Nations children were forcibly sent to residential schools. The negative impact of this period in Canadian history affects them greatly to this day. Some still bear the physical scars. According to the Anglican Church of Canada, which administered 25 residential schools between 1820-1969, “in many cases the children were forbidden to speak their mother tongue, their cultures were condemned as barbaric and their spirituality as heathen...many Aboriginal persons view with contempt the church which tried to eradicate their culture.” The church formally apologized in 1993 for the harm done by the residential school system.

In 1990 at Oka, 4000 troops were deployed (using tanks and helicopters) against a small number of Mohawks asserting their indigenous land rights in a dispute with the municipal government. In 1998, the United Nations Committee of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights stated in their Concluding Observations on Canada that there is “gross disparity between Aboriginal people and the majority of Canadians with respect to Covenant rights. There has been little or no progress in the alleviation of social and economic deprivation among Aboriginal people.”

MYTH: the conditions Aboriginal peoples face in Canada are exaggerated. They aren't that bad.

Although Aboriginal people in Canada are making many positive strides, there is still a long way to go to eliminate the disparities between Aboriginal peoples and the majority of Canadians. Many of the reserves in Canada are small, remote, and deficient in resources. Others, such as the Metis, have never possessed any land. The life expectancy of Aboriginal people is on average 7 years less than Canadians overall. In 1995, at least 40% of the Aboriginal population and a full 60% of Aboriginal children under the age of 6 lived under the poverty line, according to Statistics Canada. Systemic discrimination persists in the justice system. For example, First Nations accused are more than twice as likely as non-Aboriginal people to be incarcerated, are more likely to have legal representation at court proceedings, and often plead guilty because they are intimidated by the court and simply want to get proceedings over with. As a result, while Aboriginal peoples account for approximately 3% of Canada's population, 21% of women and 17% of men incarcerated in federal prisons in 1999 were Aboriginal. Of child and teen prostitutes in Canada, 90% are Aboriginal.

MYTH: Aboriginal peoples aren't doing too much to make things better for themselves.

Like many Aboriginal groups, Aboriginal youth in Canada are getting more and more involved in working towards a better future. Numerous programs have been developed and implemented by Aboriginal youth, geared towards increasing the life changes of future

generations. Aboriginal youth are increasingly organizing themselves to play a role in politics and governance. Many youth councils are being established across Canada, providing unified voice and strength to the youth of First Nations, Inuit, Metis throughout our country and thereby bringing their issues and concerns to the forefront. The Assembly of First Nations-Quebec and Labrador youth council, for example, is conducting youth community consultation in order to bring a grassroots youth voice to decision-making bodies, including the Assembly of Chiefs.

MYTH: racism should be permitted as anyone can think what they want. It doesn't harm anyone physically.

Racist actions—which arise from racist beliefs—are a violation of both the Canadian Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Racism leads to violence. By not recognizing each other as equal, racism allows people to rationalize harming others.

MYTH: having a racial stereotype is not harmful. Stereotypes are natural and cannot be eliminated.

Stereotypes are ideas which often lead to feelings of prejudice, which further lead to discrimination—an act of unequal treatment. Many experts have long noted that whatever thoughts we have will eventually manifest themselves in our actions and in society. While it is natural for the brain to categorize information (which can lead to stereotypes), having a better understanding of each other allows us to have what is true and what is a false assumption.

MYTH: racism is a huge problem. There's not much I can do about it. Besides, being an effective anti-racist means having to go out and protest and give speeches.

Racism is a huge problem and that is why you need to do something about it. All great changes in society have begun at the level of the individual. Remember that each individual influences everyone around them, and each of us will get to know thousands of other people over the course of our lifetimes. That's a lot of difference you can be making! Leadership experts have found that leading by example is the most effective. Imagine how you feel if someone makes a racist joke about a new student, and you feel like you have to go along with it. But then what if another friend goes up to the new student and introduces him/herself—wouldn't that make you feel more comfortable in not going along with the joke? Wouldn't you like to be able to provide that kind of empowerment to others?

MYTH: no one would listen to me anyway. What can 1 do?

Changing social attitudes is all about momentum. People gradually know that racist beliefs are wrong, but are just waiting for permission to show that they know so. By showing you are anti-racist, you give everyone around you the understanding that it is normal not to be racist.

I can accept that sometimes politeness does not work against racism; I can accept that sometimes politeness can be my only weapon/defense against racism; I can accept that sometimes a head-on collision is necessary to create change.

Modern Racism in Canada

What is Racism?

A basic definition of racism is, **“an attribution of inferiority to a particular racial group and the use of the principle to propagate and justify the unequal treatment of this group”**. It can be based on the notion of biological inferiority, or may attribute inferiority to cultural deficiency, social inadequacy and technological underdevelopment. Racism can be institutional, systemic, and individual; and it can be directly or indirectly inflicted. But when we talk of racism, it is important to go beyond definitions and attempt to understand its complexities. There are many different types of racism, implemented in many different ways, used to accomplish many different racist goals.

Racism is generally categorized into three types:

- 1) **Individual**, direct, racism when individuals expressly espouse racist views as part of a personal credo;
- 2) **Subconscious**, indirect, or unintentional racism when individuals hold negative attitudes towards racial minorities based on stereotypical assumptions, fear and ignorance; and
- 3) **Institutional or systemic** racism when institutions such as government agencies, businesses and organizations that are responsible for maintaining public policy, health care, education, housing, social and commercial services and other frameworks of society, functioning such a way as to limit rights or opportunities on the basis of race. Institutional racism can be both direct and indirect.

A 1989 report entitled, *Eliminating Racial Discrimination in Canada*, describes the extent to which individual racism is deeply embedded in the Canadian culture. The Report states that between 12 and 16 percent of Canadians admitted to strong intolerance based on race; 94% of job agency recruiters surveyed indicated that they had rejected job seekers based on race; and showed that 31 out of 73 Toronto landlords discriminated on the basis of race.

Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba captured the experience of systemic and institutionalized racism for Aboriginal people in its summary. They spoke of policing that is at times “unresponsive” and at times “over-zealous”, usually intensive and often abusive. They spoke of a penal system that is harsh and unproductive. They spoke of parole procedures that delay their release from the penal system. They spoke of child welfare and youth justice systems that isolate young people from their families and their communities. They spoke, too, of historical wrongs, of betrayals and injustice, and of a vision for restoring social harmony to their communities.

In politics, racism and prejudice are always founded on seemingly rational, strategic arguments, designed to appeal to “common sense” and so-called logical thinking. It could be said that racism is the idea, and discrimination the practice. But there are other ways to practice racism. In addition to overt discriminatory treatment, and covert discriminatory treatment, the tools of the racist include the use of violence and genocide, racial hate messages and threats and denial.

The choice of tool often varies with the class, position, or power of the oppressor. Lower and middle class members of the dominate group might use violence against racial

minorities, while upper middle class members of the dominate group might resort to denial, in their righteous indignation against “diversity” and “reverse discrimination”. Institutions—government bodies, schools, corporations—perpetuate racism through a variety of overt and covert means.

But whatever the means, all forms of racism inflict wounds, wounds that are neither random nor isolated, wounds that can be fatal. Regardless of whether we are talking gutter racism, parlour racism, corporate racism and government racism, they all work in concert, reinforcing and perpetuating existing conditions of inequality.

If you deny racism exists, any attempt to correct it can be categorized as discrimination and the creation of “special rights” for the minority group. Using the terminology of “special rights” to describe legal protection of vulnerable groups, denies the fact that racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination exist. Even a superficial understanding of the history and current realities of discrimination in Canada reveals that such “special rights” talk is little more than the ignorance of privilege and the privilege of ignorance. It is no accident that the hot racial issues in equality today is “reverse discrimination”—challenges to affirmative action plans, that is, claims by white people that they are victims of racism.

Another technique of denial is to call racism by another name. The press is very good at this. The presence of racism is often ignored or covered up with euphemisms such as “disadvantaged” or “underprivileged.” This status is then subtly, or not subtly, linked to stereotypes which portray us as people who either have problems or cause problems. They are pictured as too lazy to work, failures in school and prone to substance abuse and crime. They are portrayed as less bright, less civilized, less sensitive and less human. Is it any wonder our people are treated in ways that are less friendly and less human than the ways others are treated? Such portrayals justify oppression in the minds of racists and eggs them on.

These following messages can be viewed as unintentional subliminal messages:

- *The Winnipeg Sun is a case in point. For several months, the paper ran a crime stoppers advertisement in the paper, illustrated by a photograph of two Aboriginal teenagers being frisked by police officers. The effect of the photograph was to link in the minds of the readers, that the messages and the use of discriminatory stereotypes led the public to consciously or unconsciously believe all Aboriginal youth are delinquent.*
- *The Calgary Herald is another example. For almost a year, the Herald had repeatedly given sensational front-page headlines to alleged financial mismanagement by the administration of the Stoney reserve. At the same time, much more serious cases of mismanagement of much larger amounts of taxpayers money by the provincial government goes by with very little comment.*

Two things are going on here. First, the disproportionate coverage minimizing the fault of the Canadian government and maximizing the fault of the Stoney (Aboriginal) government effectively maintains White superiority and Aboriginal inferiority. Second, sensational coverage over such a long period of time cannot help but to create the false impression that a crisis of sorts exists, and that all Aboriginals must be incapable of running their own affairs. Another current example is the New Brunswick furor over Aboriginals harvesting of trees on Crown land. There wasn't much public outrage about forestry management practices in the province until a court ruled that Aboriginal people had harvesting rights on crown land. Now that Aboriginals are involved, it seems that everyone has conservation concerns.

Another way to make racism disappear is to “culturalise” it. To make this work, racism must be characterized as a phenomenon having more to do with ethnicity and culture than with domination and discrimination. Examples of this can be found in some well-meaning but misguided “culturally sensitive” interpretations of racist practices in the administration of justice.

For example, in trying to explain the over-representation of Aboriginal youth in jail, “culturally sensitive” analyses have concluded that cultural differences affecting demeanour in the courtroom, explain why youths are unnecessarily criminalized and labeled as unreliable, remorseless, and un-cooperative. This interpretation is based on the understanding that police, lawyers, and judges administering justice on reserves, more often than not, come from cultural, social and economic backgrounds different than the majority of persons in the communities they serve, and, as a result, may misinterpret demeanour to the detriment of Aboriginal youth. All these non-cultural factors contribute to over-representation of Aboriginal youth in jail, but are overlooked in a “culturally sensitive” explanation. Racism never gets mentioned.

Sometimes non-Aboriginal judges, lawyers, and other players in the justice and social services systems have been too quick to embrace “culture” in ways that fail to challenge patriarchy, colonialism, imperialism, and sexism. Their notion of culture simply confines it to a static, unchangeable and timeless vacuum of values, beliefs, knowledge and customs and sometimes operates to the detriment of Aboriginal women. While cultural values of healing and reconciliation must be respected, equality and the safety of women cannot be overlooked, especially in cases involving violence. Coming to terms with women’s reality at the intersection of racism and sexism is something which more often than not, can be easily lost in the rush to be “culturally sensitive.”

In order to properly deal with these complex issues, Canadian courts must come to grips with the contemporary act of “old school” (dominant group) supremacy in and out of the courtroom and not simply get by with a superficial reference to history, cultural biases, and social conditions. They must strive to understand how cultural differences within and between groups operate. Once these understandings are obtained, there is a far better chance that changes towards meaningful equality, respecting cultural differences, will take place.

Due to many recent incidences of abuse and killings of Aboriginal women and children in Canada, both on and off reserve, has Aboriginal people alarmed, angry and are calling for immediate redress in the form of an independent inquiry by First Nations to examine all the surrounding contextual issues, including sexism and racism in institutional practices of the RCMP and other agencies.

The *Aboriginal circle of life* experience tells us that racial violence and harassment are widespread, common and life threatening; that we cannot necessarily rely on the police to protect us when we most certainly expect respect. This week’s arrest of five people in which police have described as the racially motivated killing of a 65 year old Sikh man in British Columbia clearly demonstrates that racism and intolerance is alive and well in Canada. The despair, hopelessness, and lack of control we all feel as a result of such a senseless and brutal loss of life, leads some to the tragic belief, supported by experiences and perceptions, they do not have lives worth living.

The Future

From a general Aboriginal perspective there is concern that racism in Canadian society continues to share our lives institutionally, systematically and individually. The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry in Manitoba, the Donald Marshall Inquiry in Nova Scotia, the Cawsey Report in Alberta and the Royal Commission of Aboriginal People all agree. The question now, what is to be done? Anti-racism strategies, to the extent that they exist, are all about the relative value of human lives. A negative response to racism is a statement that victims of racism are valued members of our society. Recognizing the harms of racism and the need to strengthen our dangerously fickle collective commitment to equality requires us to *listen* to those who suffer from discrimination...to hear their stories.

It must be understood that *True Racists* have no interest or desire to investigate the reality of others different from themselves nor the injustices which result when others' realities are imposed on them. Their objectives are to roll back progress through the mobilization of fear, resentment, ignorance and intolerance. For them, difference is dealt with by making it disappear—by treating everyone the same. Non-Aboriginal Canadians must understand this never has been and never will be good enough, because it will only perpetuate racism, indefinitely. Equality requires a commitment to the proposition that there are alternative claims to the “truth.”

Another prerequisite to future equality is an accounting of the past. The heinous violations of human rights which have been perpetuated upon our people for generations, merely because of our race, cannot go unmarked. Their extent should be catalogued, their detail exposed, and their causes explored. Once all this has been done, the results must be published so that society will have a lasting record and guide to avoid future repetition of the violations we have suffered. If the truth of residential schools, religious persecution, cultural destruction, mass abductions of our children, remains unexplored and obscure, I fear equality, peace and justice will elude our grasp. Only when misconduct is exposed and addressed can we begin to build a fence around it and move confidently and purposefully towards the full achievement of equality, dignity and respect, which is what all people want!

Some progress has been made in this regard. A first step was taken with establishment of the Healing Fund and the apology for residential school abuse. Many other steps remain which will require the partnership of goodwill of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. I look forward to traveling this path with you.

*Excerpts from Phil Fontaine's 1998 Speech at School of Policy Studies, Queen's University,
Kingston, Ontario*