

BIPOC and Witness Voices

*Please note - these submissions have been altered to remove mature language

Indigenous Woman Voice Kat W (respondent asked for name to be used)

I've been harassed by (white) passengers on my commute home from work (wearing professional clothes, so it's not classism that time); an older Indigenous woman was ODing on the bus and peace officers hit her instead of providing medical aid. They always happened on the #3 after 4 pm, usually downtown to 107 Ave/ 109 St. The driver did not ever intervene and considering the abuse they often take (and racialized), I don't entirely blame them.

When I still went into the office (pre-Covid), I ended up getting fed up with the #3 reality and took a different bus and route home - it meant getting home about 20-30 minutes later than I could with #3, but much more pleasant. One time when I was getting harassed a fellow uncle (native older guy) stepped in to defend me, but that's it. I can handle the average racist bulls***, but the woman who was hit by the peace officers was so f****d up and upsetting. I was so scared for her, for all of us. Living just off 107 Ave means there's an incredible amount of diversity in my hood - diversity of culture, health, and privilege. I don't see anyone really standing up for those who are racialized, ill and/or poorer. I worry about the Black immigrant moms with their little kids. Lots of them take the 107 Ave buses. Lots of them witness this kind of abuse, or receive it themselves. How are you reaching out to them? How are you reaching out to those who sleep rough (many who are Indigenous)? Safe to say many of them aren't on Twitter due to resources or language barriers. Please try to reach out beyond Twitter and into those spaces for those perspectives. I'm just an NDN who often passes for Latina with a professional job. Not the same reality as they have.

I do appreciate you listening and taking this in and nya:wen for doing so, but I think there are some people who need to be heard. They are my neighbours. Please, please reach out to them.

Black Woman Voice

There are many incidents I can recall, and I have been taking the bus working fulltime downtown since 2005. I have therefore experienced a lot of racism on the bus and I am in fact starting to look at options to public transport as it wears on you with time.

1. The LRT / Bus is a very racializing place / space for many non-white Canadians as I have watched how sometimes when it is a nonwhite person, their fair tickets are scrutinized more than the white Canadians. If the policy is to check if someone has paid for the service then the bus tickets need to be

checked the same way for everyone. (While I know not all bus drivers do this I have watched some who do it regularly).

2. I have witnessed how sometimes the bus driver drives away when it is a nonwhite person trying to catch the bus and I have witnessed how they wait even past the time they are supposed to leave if it is a white person. (Again specific drivers not all).
3. I have experienced racism on the ETS many times. One of the most common experiences I have faced before covid is when people stand up and do not want to sit near you. In some cases, they come and sit in a place and when they look up and see it is you, they stand up and go and sit somewhere else or they simply stand up and hold onto the railing. For someone who is white you can say maybe they just wanted to stand or maybe they did not feel comfortable. When you face racism, you feel it in your inner being. There are many times when people have stood up and you know it is not that they do not want to be around you. It is a different feeling and you can easily tell between the two.
4. Another common incident I have had on the bus is when people think or assume that you are not from Edmonton and ask you where you are from. Why should it matter where I am coming from? I paid my fair on the bus and all I want is simply to get to my destination just like everyone else. However, in many incidents white people feel that it is their God-given right to ask people where someone is from. Imagine being born in Edmonton and constantly being asked where you are from. It indicates that this person does not see you. They only see that this person can in no way be from here. Imagine if all day we keep asking each other where we are from? It is very exhausting and you want to leave the bus as soon as possible.
5. One other incident I had was when I used to sit at the back of the bus; one day a group of 3 young Caucasian men got on the bus and they were talking to each other and as I kept looking on one of them asked me, "what are you looking at N-word"? I had not opened my mouth or done anything. I just looked away and did not look back in that direction anymore and as soon as the bus stopped at the next bus stop I got off and waited for the next bus.
6. There was another incident in 2018 when a passenger got on the bus from downtown heading to the west-end and when he saw me at the back of the bus he kept saying "f*** you N-word over and over again". The good thing this time the bus driver came to the back of the bus and he said, "I am not leaving until you get off the bus". We waited for 15 minutes and the bus driver called in to bus link and reported the incident. The passenger then got off the bus before anyone came to apprehend him.
7. One other very common incident I have faced is the fact that I work downtown and I am a fulltime student at the University of Alberta. I have my

student ID which works as a bus pass. However, I have been pulled on the side by the transit officers to see if I have paid my fair and I have watched how many friends of mine, students (Caucasian) as well are not required to show their bus pass.

8. I attend University in the evenings and therefore, I am usually waiting for the LRT or bus at night. (Before Covid) I have been on many occasions stopped by transit officers while waiting for a bus / LRT and I have been asked what I was doing and the fact that I am not supposed to be loitering. I have watched when my classmates with whom we attend class are not bothered or asked about what they are doing.
9. I have sometimes wanted to sit in specific places on the bus but was refused to sit there because someone has booked the place for their friend who will get on the bus maybe at a later bus stop. This happens a lot on route #100. While it is not necessarily racist, but as someone who paid for the bus fee, I should be able to get to sit anywhere I want as long as there is a seat (Of course after we are done with covid).
10. Another incident I watched on the bus was when a family of four Black passengers were speaking their native language and someone stood up and started harassing them saying, "Speak English in Canada, otherwise go back where you came from". They all kept quiet and stared at the man in shock and then he walked away. As a passenger I do not like to witness the harassment of another person for no reason as it puts me in a space where I am asking myself, should I stand up for them?, is the person dangerous that they could harm me? Etc.

My humble recommendations would be, if there is to be meaningful change where **all** passengers on public transit can feel safe (with the exception of a few incidents when people are under substance abuse), there has to be no tolerance for racism. There have to be tangible consequences for people who use derogatory terms on public transit to belittle others. While **racial slurs or behaviors are tolerated** under the law and people are usually told to apologize and ETS gives an apology and some phrase to the media, we need real change as the **scars of racism have real impacts on the people who suffer** them.

While racial slurs are not quantifiable like say, he slapped her in the face three times, the emotional damage is irreparable and it lasts a lifetime. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) are as entitled as everyone else is, as long as we have paid our bus fair, to enjoy a racism-free environment on the bus or LRT. ETS needs to put policies in place where there are tangible consequences for racial harassment, racial profiling and use of derogatory terms on public transport. This is the humane thing to do. Apologies do not work as the damage lasts a lifetime.

Black Woman Voice

Thinking back to my earlier years in education (i.e. junior high school), I spent anywhere from 1-2 hours on transit one way. As most teenagers do, I would almost always have my headphones on, but there were a few instances where I would be on the bus or LRT with friends of mine on the way home from school, or to the mall, etc. I remember in grade 9, I was on the way home from Southgate mall, when a group of older white boys (possibly in high school) got on the front of the bus. They slowly migrated to the back door where I was seated, and I heard them start to mumble and laugh with each other. That situation is already anxiety-producing, but as I tuned in, I realized that they were bullying a younger Black boy for his clothes, his even speak English.” The boy got off the bus not too long after the harassment started, but I could definitely relate to the fear and pain in his eyes. I saw him at school not too long after; he was grade 7 at my school and I always tried to show him kindness whenever I saw him again.

Black Woman Voice

I have had or witnessed the following incidents:

I have consistently seen white bus drivers intentionally drive past bus stops where members of the BIPOC specifically, Black people, are waiting for the bus.

I personally have seen many people choose not to sit next to me because of the color of my skin. They have chosen to either sit next to other non-POC people or have chosen to stand all together.

I have also heard derogatory slurs used against members of the BIPOC on the bus such as the N-word, monkey, etc.

Recently, due to the Covid virus I have heard a lot of white people on the bus or train yell or aggressively speak to specific members of the BIPOC insinuating that they are the reason for the spread of the viral disease.

I've heard a lot of racist language around Indigenous people on the bus. People have called them lazy and said things like "they should get arrested" on the bus.

Person of Colour Voice

There have been several times where POC's have been talking in their native language (on the phone or to another friend/family member), other passengers have rudely/aggressively commented that these passengers should be talking in English. The bus driver did not do anything and it was very obvious the passengers became a little frightened.

On different occasions, I have had several bus drivers be rude to me or when POC's (especially older folks) have asked for directions "if this is the correct bus to be travelling on".

I cannot fully describe exactly what happened because my father never told me, I guess it was so I would not get upset. My mother was the one who did and all I got were bits and pieces. My dad after coming home from work late one night, at the West Edmonton Transit Centre, along with several passengers had asked to step off the bus and were cuffed. There was a reported incident of a troubled passenger who had a knife on them and was being a danger. I am uncertain if that dangerous passenger was indeed on the bus my father was. However, upon hearing that this happened, I was extremely upset to hear that my father was handcuffed. I felt this situation overall could have been better handled among EPS and ETS.

This is not a POC scenario however I have been noticing that in the past and this winter, ETS drivers do not fully stop at designated bus stops to pick up passengers. Sometimes there is poor lighting making the passengers a little bit hard to see. Other times, I have seen passengers carefully walking (due to snow/icy pavements) towards the stop (it is obvious that they are wanting to catch the bus) miss their busses.

This is a positive, as female passengers my mother and I have had extremely wonderful experiences of bus drivers dropping us off closer to where we needed to go when it was dark/late evening. This has also happened when we here the only passengers left on the bus.

Non-BIPOC Woman Voice (Witness)

My voice isn't the one you're looking for, but when you mention transit and BIPOC I am compelled to tell you about an experience I had a few years back. It haunts me to this day and is one of the most disgusting displays of humanity I've ever seen. I used to take the 12 home from work, during evening rush hour. The bus was always, always, always busy. This day I was standing up, near the back doors, all seats were taken, all standing room full. It was pretty jam packed. There was a black woman sitting with her two children near the front of the bus. One child early elementary aged, the other maybe preschool aged. Some older white men near her at the front of the bus started to harass her about her children giving up their seats, because she would not have paid fare for them due to their age. She rightly defended their right to keep their seats. It turned very ugly from there. The men yelled at her, told her to go back to Africa, and other things I can't remember in detail now. To this woman, in front of her two small children. She defended herself with grace, but not one person spoke up or defended her. The driver did meekly intervene a couple of times, saying things like "I'm going to have to ask you to stop please". Soon her children were terrified and crying. This

Attachment #1

all happened on the short ride from the superstore on Kingsway Ave to the Kingsway transit station where a lot of people, including the woman and her children, and I, got off the bus. The woman and her children were crying hysterically at this point. On their own. I wish I could say someone (including myself) did something, but no one did. It was disgusting, and as mad as I am at myself for not saying something while we were on the bus (at the time I told myself I was too far from them ugh) I am much more angry that those men were not made to leave the bus, or at the very least that the driver did not tell them that those young children were entitled to the seats they were sitting in. Maybe it's what they're supposed to do, and I sympathize that drivers have a tough job. But he treated both sides as if they were equally in the wrong (when he said anything at all, which was not much) when they were not. ETS (and all the passengers frankly) failed that woman and her children that day, in my very strong opinion.