

### Brief History of Racism In Alberta

In Canada racism has been shaped by processes of colonization/dispossession and immigration. Due to late settlement compared to Eastern and Central provinces and an economic emphasis on natural resources, Western Canada (and specifically Alberta) has experienced these processes in ways both similar to, and unique from the rest of the country. Today, the province's demographics, economics, and understandings of identity have been produced by institutionalized and individualized racism, woven through policies and discourse, as well as anti-racist resistance.

Aileen Moreton Robinson, writing in the context of Australia but nevertheless relevant to our setting, explains that a possessive logic of white patriarchal sovereignty discursively and ideologically naturalizes the nation as a white possession (2004). In other words, white people stake primary claim to both land and nation in Canada by naturalizing geography as having been discovered and developed by European settlers when neither is in fact true (Razack, 2002).

Policy seeking to address historical racism in Alberta should consider structural and individual racism within this context. An example of racism tied to the production of a white national identity in and of itself, Black history has been largely erased from settlement narratives in Alberta (Thompson, 2021).

Regardless, Black people have participated in Western Canadian settlement since the 1800s, arriving as both enslaved people with French colonizers (Madibbo, 2021), and as settlers themselves (Wang, 2021). Many African Americans travelled from the Southern United States, escaping Jim Crow laws and motivated by Canada's Dominion Lands Act (1872), which offered cheap homesteads to Western settlers in order to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous people from traditional territories (Wang, 2021). One example of this is Amber Valley, a town settled by Black settlers who travelled from the United states in the early 1900s (Wang, 2021).

Following early Western settlement, anti-Black racism and eugenics discourse in the early 1900s led to federal legislation preventing further immigration of Black people into Alberta (Madibbo, 2021). The prevention of racialized immigration into Canada did not only target Black people. From the late 1800s to early 1900s Canada's Immigration Act underwent numerous amendments aimed at restricting immigration from Asia and explicitly seeking to maintain Canada as a "white man's country" (Guo & Wong, 2018, p. 26 [quoting Mackenzie King(1908)]). Immigration from many countries was denied from 1908-1947 by the Continuous Journey Regulation, which prevented migrants from arriving in Canada by ship if the ship had to stop in a port on route, effectively barring

migration from South Asia. Because of this, Alberta did not experience large-scale migration from South Asia until the middle of the century.

In addition to anti-Black racism and historical erasure, Alberta has long housed anti-Asian racism. These sentiments grew and spread from British Columbia, since Chinese and Japanese immigrants began arriving in the province in the late 1800s, and early 1900s respectively (Palmer, 1980). Interestingly, anti-Asian racism did not target different groups in homogenous ways. While Alberta was a space of extreme discrimination against Chinese Canadians during the Great Depression and showed greater acceptance of Japanese Canadians at the time, this pattern was reversed during World War II (Palmer, 1980). During WWII, many Japanese Canadians from BC were interned and forced to work on sugar beet plantations in Alberta and other provinces (Marsh, 2012). Following Japanese internment, Alberta's sugar beet industry later relied on coerced labour from Indigenous people through the 1950s and 60s (Laliberte & Satzewich, 1999).

Throughout the 1900s Asian immigration acted as a political lightning rod in the province and country across party lines (Palmer, 1980). Labour organizations in both BC and Alberta showed deep hostility to Asian workers (Palmer, 1980). Post War movements in Alberta sought the disenfranchisement of Asian Canadians, their segregation to Lethbridge and Calgary, and specifically targeted Chinese Canadians through boycotts and calls for taxes on Chinese-owned laundries and a ban on Chinese employers from hiring white women (Palmer, 1980).

While Alberta experienced the impacts of immigration policy that overtly sought the production of a white European Canada, so too did it see simultaneous effects of policies aimed at the dispossession and assimilation of Indigenous people. During the 1900s there were 25 residential schools operating across the province, many located around Edmonton (Grant, 2021). In 1928 the Alberta government passed the Sexual Sterilization Act and created the Eugenics Board which especially targeted people with disabilities and Indigenous people with forced sterilization until the 1970s (Dack, 2020). Anti-Indigenous racism became institutionalized in Alberta and across Canada resulting in inequitable access to services, and disproportionate vulnerability to violence, especially for those with intersecting marginalization along axes of gender and sexuality (Simpson 2016; Razack, 2000; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

Colonial and immigration policies grounded in racism facilitated a rise in hate groups across Canada. Western Canada has long been home to white supremacist sentiment. In the 1930s Alberta saw overt Ku Klux Klan activity (Bartley, 2020). In 1931, the Ku Klux Klan campaigned for Edmonton mayoral candidate Daniel Knott, who, once elected, granted them permission to hold a

rally and burn crosses in what is now considered Northlands (Phillips, 2016). Though Ku Klux Klan activity and explicit support for the group eventually faded, white supremacist sentiment persisted for decades following, and perhaps remains among many Albertans today. This discourse ran deep and was evidenced by Western sugar advertising that played on racist stereotypes of Black workers into the late 1950s (Belisle, 2021).

During the 1940s, immigration policy began shifting away from overtly racist exclusions. Following this, Black immigrants resumed arrival in Alberta. However, once here, many faced systemic and individual hostility. For example, though many immigrants claimed Francophone identity, arriving from countries that had been colonized by France, few were able to access Francophone rights afforded their white peers (Madibbo, 2021). Additionally, during the 1940s-1960s, Canadian farm labour was reliant on Caribbean workers who had no rights to stay in Canada and faced precarious working conditions, including the threat of constant deportation (Satzewich, 1988).

Historical attempts to reconcile competing goals of ensuring adequate labour supplies while producing and promoting a white national identity have recently evolved. Processes of globalization and neoliberalism have increased the interconnectedness and international mobility of both capital and labour, leading to an increase in both racialized temporary foreign labour, and populist anti-migrant discourse in Canada. Though the Caribbean farm labour program ended, more recent manifestations of Canada's foreign labour reliance, such as the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, continue to exploit racialized temporary workers across industries in Alberta through their differential exclusion as second-class citizens who do not hold full rights in Canada (Foster & Barnetson, 2015b; Könönen, 2018).

In addition to temporary worker precarity, many racialized immigrants face the issue of deskilling when their credentials are not recognized in Canada and Alberta, which is a form of legislated racism. Of note, in the 1960s, Alberta saw a shortage of teaching labour and began recruiting teachers from Jamaica to fill the gap (Kelly & Cui, 2007). Once in Alberta, teachers' experiences in the profession were shaped by processes of racialization and deskilling. However, though they were made to pursue further education at Canadian universities, teachers were permitted to work in the meantime, demonstrating that Alberta of the 1960s may have in some ways been better in recognizing immigrants' skills and education than the province is now.

Historical and ongoing racism in the province is especially relevant to city policy development today due to increased targeting of Asian Canadians, exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and increases in anti-Muslim and anti-Black

violence, especially against women wearing hijabs. Hate crimes against Asian-canadians have increased significantly in major Canadian cities since last year. Racism against Black people has continued in Alberta and across Canada, and reports show Black people experienced the highest rates of police-reported hate crimes in Canada in 2019 (Madibbo, 2021). Anti-Indigenous racism is also persistent in the Province and the city. While incidents of hate crimes have been reported against Black muslim women, many incidents that target Indigenous peoples go largely unreported although they are also on the rise, mostly due to mistrust of the enforcement bodies and the system (Bench, 2021). Edmonton should enact policies to address both systemic discrimination and individual hate crimes including harassment and assault.

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