



Orientation to Ontario

RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA AGAINST PEOPLE OF COLOUR

The term “people of colour” refers to individuals who are not considered white based on the racial and ethnic standards of Western society. It is an umbrella term that includes a wide range of racial and ethnic groups, such as Black, Indigenous, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American people. The phrase is meant to highlight the shared experiences of racism and marginalization that racialized people often face.

Xenophobia comes from Greek language roots meaning “fear of strangers.” This term is used to describe the fear or dislike of other races, cultures, ways of life, or people who are not like your community. Xenophobia may be expressed as a suspicion of “the other” and a desire to eliminate their presence and it is often combined with a deep fear of losing one’s own (national, ethnic or racial) identity. Both racism and xenophobia can cause serious harm, making people feel unwelcome and fearful because of who they are or where they come from.

In Canada, racism and xenophobia have affected Black people, Indigenous peoples, and other people of colour throughout history. While the forms and visibility of these issues may have evolved, racism and xenophobia have long existed in Canada and continue to persist.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES OF RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

Though Canada is now known for being a multicultural country, it has a long history of racism spurred by xenophobia. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, laws and practices discriminated against people of colour. These are just some examples.

When Chinese immigrants came to work on the railroads in the 1800s, they had to pay high “head taxes” to enter Canada.

Indians, particularly Sikhs, settled in Canada in the late 1800s. They were marked as targets of racism due to their distinct appearance and religious customs, including their turbans and beards. In 1908, the Canadian government introduced the Continuous Journey Regulation, requiring immigrants to travel directly to Canada from their country of origin. This was impossible for Indian immigrants due to the lack of direct steamship routes.

Irish settlers in the 1800s were Catholic and mistrusted by Protestant Canadians, who feared that their growing numbers would undermine British and Protestant dominance in Canada. Landlords refused them housing, and signs reading “No Irish Need Apply” were common.

The Doukhobors arrived as refugees from Russia between 1899 and 1914, following state

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persecution in their home country. They were strongly opposed to violence of any kind as part of their religious beliefs, which conflicted with the Russian Empire's requirement that men serve in the military. In Canada, during World War I and II, many Doukhobors were conscientious objectors, and some were imprisoned for their refusal to serve in the military.

MODERN EXAMPLES OF RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

Despite laws and regulations against discrimination, racism and xenophobia persist in several ways.

Many people of colour face challenges in job searching or advancing their careers. Studies have shown that job applicants with “foreign-sounding” names are less likely to be called for interviews than those with “white-sounding” names. This kind of discrimination, whether conscious or unconscious, is a form of racism and makes it harder for people of colour to succeed in the workplace.

In schools, students of colour sometimes face bias from teachers or classmates. Students from communities of colour are three times as likely as white children to say that they have faced personal abuse. This can affect their grades and how they feel about school.

People of colour may be denied apartments or homes because of their race or background. Ethnocultural and racialized communities in Canada are 20% to 40% more likely to live in poverty than the Canadian average, making it harder for racial minorities to find safe and affordable places to live.

People of colour also experience racial profiling; they may be unfairly targeted by police or security guards because of their ethnicity or race. Carding — a controversial practice in which police officers stop individuals on the street, ask for their identification, and collect personal information, such as name, address, and date of birth, without any specific suspicion of a crime being committed — disproportionately affects people of colour. For young people of colour, carding can have a particularly negative impact, as repeated stops may lead to a feeling that they will always be treated as

criminals.

People of colour may often face increased harassment or hate crimes during times of economic or social tension. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian people experienced an increase in personal attacks and international students are often blamed as the cause of the housing affordability crisis in Canada.

In 1942, after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, the American naval base in Hawaii, the Canadian government forcibly removed over 22,000 Japanese Canadians from their homes on the Pacific coast and placed them in internment camps. Families were separated, and their property, businesses, and homes were confiscated and sold, often at a fraction of their value. Interned Japanese Canadians were not allowed to return to their homes in British Columbia until 1949, several years after the war had ended. Many never recovered their lost property or businesses, and the damage caused by this internment left lasting scars on the Japanese Canadian community.

DID YOU KNOW?

During World War II, the Japanese and Italian communities in Canada faced intense racism driven by wartime fears. Both groups were labelled “enemy aliens” by the Canadian government, leading to internment, forced registration, and surveillance.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1940, after Italy allied with Germany, approximately 600 Italian Canadians were arrested and interned in camps, even though most had no connections to fascism or the Italian government. Italian-owned businesses were boycotted, and many Italian Canadians faced harassment and violence.