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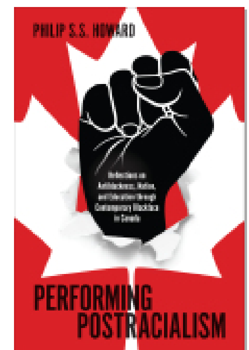

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7 Learning to Get Along at School, or Antiblack Postracialism through Multicultural Education

This chapter shifts attention away from the university site to consider antiblackness in pedagogies used in state education in the years before university. It is based on the conversations we had with students during interviews and focus groups about whether and how pre-university schooling and/or the absence of particular pedagogies might be implicated in the occurrence of blackface and other forms of antiblackness at university. The experiences participants share suggest that antiblackness is instantiated in pre-university public schooling through the absence of critical forms of education, but also through specific pedagogies I will refer to here broadly as post-racism,[1] multicultural education – a particular way of approaching issues of Blackness and racial diversity in Canadian schools.

I discuss these forms of education, and participants' experiences with them, alongside the longer histories of multicultural education and Black education in Canada to argue that these pedagogies serve as a seduction into post-racism thinking, are informed by the hegemonic context of Canadian multiculturalism and its antecedents, and are the legacy of the characteristic antiblackness of education in Canada. I conclude that these pedagogies foster rather than prevent appropriative behaviour, including blackface, and that they attempt to render Black students apathetic to antiblackness by undermining their embodied and community knowledges. I also argue that the continued existence

1 In this chapter, I distinguish between *post-racism* – a spurious claim, made particularly in Canada, to have transcended racism – and the closely related but different notion *postracialism*, which refers to the mechanisms that perpetuate racism precisely through the claim to be beyond race and racism, that is, through claims to post-racism (Goldberg, 2015).

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of these pedagogies in the 2010s and beyond is consistent with a pattern whereby Canadian education systems resist and forestall radical Black educational thought and initiatives. The chapter concludes with a call for safeguarding spaces of Black counter-knowledges and educational activism.

Teaching Post-Racism: Omission, Commission, and Multicultural Education

In the 1980s and 1990s, in the wake of the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, there was a brief time during which ministries of education across Canada were at least naming racism, and "developing policies and processes to 'review curriculum and learning to ensure that they are free of racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, and socio-economic bias'" (Joshee, 2004, p. 145). Though we know that policy-writing on its own is non-perfomative (Ahmed, 2006), this moment seemed promising in that it was naming racism and promising to implement anti-racism. In Ontario specifically, a thrust towards anti-racism education was institutionalized by the Ontario New Democratic Party (NDP) government in the 1990s, and regulated by the Ministry of Education's Policy Program Memorandum (PPM) 119 (1993), *Development and Implementation of School Board Policies on Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity*. When the government changed hands in 1995 to the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, it scrapped both the Anti-Racism Secretariat and the Ministry of Education's Anti-Racism, Access and Equity Division established by the NDP (Dei, 2003, p. 3). The dismantling of efforts to address racism in/through education in Ontario mirrored similar moves across the country as Canadian education became increasingly impacted by the logics of neoliberalism. However, PPM 119 remained on the books in Ontario, though in many school jurisdictions it was unenforced and therefore became dormant. This remained the status quo, even after the government changed hands again to the Ontario Liberal Party in 2003.

In 2009, largely as a result of lobbying by the Equity Summit Group, a collective of school board equity consultants, PPM 119 was revised and renamed *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools.* This equity strategy was ostensibly intended to revive the lagging focus on social justice in education in Ontario, while broadening the scope of PPM 119 to address other forms of structural inequity in addition to racism that had not been explicitly addressed in the original document.

Knowing this history (and similar histories in other provinces), and given that several of our respondents (from both Ontario and Quebec universities) attended school in Ontario within this era, we asked students who went to school in Canada whether they recall having received any kind of anti-racist education in their years before university, and/or any education that they felt might inform, even prevent, whether and how blackface occurs at university. The participants' answers starkly indicated that, for the most part, they had had nothing that would qualify as such. For example, among the Black respondents, Patrick at University 7 told us:

> I can't think of anything specifically that I've had in terms of anti-racist education K to 12. Maybe the closest thing, and again I can't really remember, would be some things in religion courses or world religion, where you talk about different religions around the world and respecting them differently and learning about them. But anything particularly anti-racist from K to 12 would have been non-existent. (U7S1)

More whimsically, a focus group of Black students at University 2 used humour to point to the dearth of this kind of education in their years before university. When asked about it, they responded with giggles and peals of laughter throughout the entire exchange:

> LANCE: Pardon? (*Interviewer begins to repeat, but is cut off*) No, that's the answer!
> INTERVIEWER: Oh! We were getting ready to elaborate.
> LANCE: That's the answer!
> SONJI: (*whispering*) It doesn't exist! (*at regular volume*) It'd be, like, "What? Anti-racism? Anti-what? What's this foreign – ?"
> LANCE: – foreign language? … That word "equity" didn't exist in my high school. We didn't have any anti-racism or equity. (U2BSOFG)

Valerie in the same focus group adds, "I didn't get any education on anti-racism in high school. Not that I remember! … We didn't have anything about equity-based or anti-racism stuff in my school before coming here, no." (U2BSOFGP2)

Non-Black students who participated in focus groups had much the same recollections. For example, white students said:

> We were never exposed to that. It was very Eurocentric. We were never exposed to that kind of learning. (U2FG1P7)

> That's what I was going to say. In high school we don't really learn about this kind of stuff at all. (U2FG1P9)
>
> Racial and ethnic education in high school … even history and civics there wasn't a lot of discussion of race relations, and Canadian history was all about what those old white dudes did in [City 1], you know. (U1FG1P2)

These responses suggest that it was very rare for participants to have received any serious critical attention to matters of race, never mind Blackness, in their schooling and, in the context of this research, certainly nothing that might have mitigated participation in blackface.

However, to say that they received no critical education around race and Blackness in school is not the same as saying that they were not, in fact, schooled into a particular way of thinking about race, racism, and Blackness. For within this broader general climate of omission, and alongside a few accounts of educators teaching blatantly antiblack knowledge, the students did identify what amounted to a pedagogy in these matters that took a very particular form. Valerie at University 2 tells us:

> I was multicultural chair at my student [council], and we had one multicultural day of the year. And all we really did, though, was we brought food and stuff from different cultures, and we had the different countries and their flags and stuff. And then we would have performances. But that's it. That's about it. (U2FGBSOP2)

What Valerie describes is a very common pedagogy in Canada, rooted in multiculturalism, that understands its educational objective to be that of fostering "cultural harmony" and that ignores racism and racialization. It characteristically understands those who are racialized as always already originating beyond Canada's borders (thus the focus on flags), and it views opportunities to share cultural practices, often pertaining to "food and festival," as the solution to cultural misunderstanding.

Ava at University 3 shares about her student club, which was similar:

> I don't think I got any of that [kind of education] in my high school or my elementary school. I mean, we had like the STOP campaign when I was in elementary school – like Students Together Opposing Prejudice – but how do you really explain prejudice to ten-year-olds in a kind of way that they actually understand and take in? (U3FGP3)

In Ava's opinion, the club had minimal impact, which she attributed to a faulty premise that younger children cannot understand systemic inequity. However, what appears more important is that the club stopped at notions of individual prejudice – similar to the focus on cultural harmony – and Ava indicates that she learned little about Blackness, antiblackness, racism, or structural oppression. Further, Ava did not speak of having experienced these more critical forms of education in later years when, presumably, students would have been more mature and the conversation might have been more sophisticated.

When asked about specific initiatives in her schooling, Sonji at University 2 tells us about assemblies, which she, like Ava, viewed as having minimal impact:

> It's the most ineffective education ever. … this is what they will do. Basically – I am trying to remember; I was there last year, it shouldn't be this hard – but maybe they will have one assembly that they will devote to every single diversity issue, and they will do it like once every two years or whatever. And so they will have the one assembly with teachers just standing there. … I went to a uniform school or whatever, so they will be like, "Come to school on time. Don't fight each other. Now wait, don't be a racist!" [Anti-racism education] doesn't really exist. And then that coupled with the fact that all we learn about is white people. It's kind of like a double negative. (U2FGBSOP3)

Sonji's account of these forgettable assemblies and the casual injunctions against racist behaviour indicates the marginal place that even these inadequate approaches to racism take within the school culture.

These excerpts suggest a number of things that were borne out across the interviews with students who had been educated in Canada (often Ontario) before coming to university. First, we see that these programs are superficial and mainly extracurricular and episodic rather than critical, within the curriculum, and sustained. They treat racism and antiblackness as being unworthy of substantive attention because they are presumed of little relevance in Canada, as we shall see. In other words, they largely take a post-racism approach. Second, they are largely student led, with teachers minimally involved. Sonji's observation that the teachers are "just standing there" at equity assemblies while students presented captures this uninterested, hands-off approach quite well. Third, it was evident that Black and other racialized students seemed to end up being primarily the ones to become involved in leading these kinds of initiatives. It appears that Black and racialized students seek out forms of learning at school about the racial

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terms of their lives, identities, and experiences, and/or that these students are guided towards these initiatives by schools. The programs available at school to respond to this kind of student need at best take an approach that translates antiblackness and racism into prejudice and bullying, and at worst exist to placate the students, as we shall see. That these initiatives are occasional, extracurricular, and student led (with a possible staff advisor) sends implicit messages to the students about their relative unimportance – a message students are able to recognize as such in retrospect, if not as they occur. The casual, superficial, extracurricular approach, and the ways that behavioural norms are enforced (as in: "Don't be racist!" is made to be of the same order as "Don't be late!" at Sonji's school), guide students towards dismissive, post-racism attitudes and away from substantive engagement with matters impacting the lives of Black students, as Sonji goes on to explain:

> I think, number one, people are like, "Yeah, yeah, don't be a racist? Everyone knows that, silly! Come on, now. I love all people!" But it's like we don't speak about what ingrained societal racism exists, and we don't speak about things like blackface and issues that are still there and derive from issues that happened long ago. (U2FGBSOP3)

That these kinds of approaches are inadequate ways of educating about and addressing racism and antiblackness is not new information. This has long been signalled by scholars in Canada in relation to similar pedagogies that have preceded it (e.g., Dei, 1996; James, 1995; Lee et al., 1998; Thomas, 1987). Rather, with reference to this book's engagement with blackface, what I am interested in here is how these students understand these pedagogies in relationship to blackface and other antiblack experiences in university. I reflect on what it might mean that these pedagogies persist in this post-racism form up to the contemporary moment, their impacts on Black students, and the importance of Black community-based initiatives in countering them.

Canadian Post-Racism Multicultural Education in Context: Historical Antecedents

The approaches to education that students describe cannot be fully understood without examining the contexts of their production. Though some bear the label "multicultural," they do not abruptly appear after multiculturalism became a dominant discourse in Canada. Rather, they are the legacy of a long educational trajectory developed in response

to the cultural and linguistic diversity, and within the racist structures, that have always been endemic in Canada. Joshee (2004) locates the beginning of this kind of education prior to Canadian federation in an overtly assimilationist agenda initially to turn immigrants into "good" British citizens in North America, and later, after federation, into patriotic Canadians, while coaxing white Canadians to mingle with new immigrants to expedite the assimilation process (p. 135). This citizenship education was also developed to quell the radical influences of burgeoning labour and white feminist movements in the 1920s and 1930s, and to bolster support for Canadian war efforts among a diverse populace during the World War II years (p. 137).

The next iteration of this educational trend, now calling itself multicultural education, was an outcome of the 1963 Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (B&B Commission), which was struck partially to stabilize the nation state in response to rising Quebec nationalism by equalizing the places of English and French as "founding races" of Canada (Haque, 2012; Thobani, 2007; Walcott, 2014b). However, the B&B Commission's consultations brought to the fore the concerns of racialized and linguistic groups who were neither linguistically nor culturally French or English (even if they spoke French and/or English), and who contested the fact that the bilingual/bicultural framework erased them. The federal government's subsequent 1971 Multiculturalism Policy was an effort to manage the demands of these groups. However, it did not undo the racializing effects of the bilingual/bicultural framework, but rather mystified the racial-colonial logics that undergird Canadian bilingualism and biculturalism that frame French and British whiteness as language, reframe colonization as "founding," and reconceptualize non-British, non-French "others" as belonging to the realm of culture – that is, intrinsic, immutable, cultural Otherness (Haque, 2012; Walcott, 2014b). Thus, multiculturalism and the multiculturalism education associated with it[2] came to have an emphasis on sharing culture but no substantive attention to Canada's histories of colonialism, antiblackness, and racism.

From this history, it becomes clear that the contemporary post-racism, multicultural forms of education that students report experiencing in 2013–14 are rooted historically in conservative and

2 While education in Canada is governed at the provincial level, federal influence on this provincial jurisdiction was particularly deliberate in the areas of citizenship and multicultural education at this time (Joshee, 2004, p. 128), and thus multiculturalism education gained traction across Canada.

nationalistic efforts to manage racialized people and radicalism in Canada. Given these roots, they remain *counter to* goals of social and racial justice.

Multiculturalism: Harmony, Exchange, and Blackface

The students we spoke to were well aware of the ways in which the peculiar post-racism education they experienced is couched within dominant Canadian national narratives of post-racism multiculturalism. A white student told us:

> I think there is a lot to be said about our public education system and the investment the government has in teaching all students that, like, Canada's so multicultural and, like, we don't have racism here. That's the image that we're supposed to consume. (U1FG1P3)

This student connects the post-race approach to racism (as that which everyone already understands, and that which is already past) to the national post-racism mythology of a peace-loving, egalitarian nation that Canada is invested in propagating. Sonji speaks of the same discourse about Canada in specific reference to the ways it views Black people's relationship to the nation state:

> A lot of Black issues are kind of ignored especially in Canada, because in Canada since we didn't enslave people as long as our US counterparts and since there are less Black people and not really a climate for [plantation slavery] in Canada, racism is somehow less of an issue, a lower issue, for a lot of schools. So it is not taught, or it is not even aware [*sic*]. A lot of people are taught since we're multicultural, to ignore issues. (U2FGBSOP3)

Sonji too connects Canadian national identity – in this case, that it denies Canadian antiblackness or suggests that it is kinder and gentler – to the ways in which schools dismiss serious consideration of what Sonji calls Black issues.

In Chapter 3 we saw how Canada's national sense of post-racism egalitarianism flows from the dominant discourse of multiculturalism, as well as a mythical rendition of its relationship to Blackness. Here I look more closely at the Multiculturalism Act, the discourse it promotes, how these have shaped educational initiatives in Canada, and what this might have to do with blackface. Through the act, race is reframed as culture and culture as fungible. There are two mentions of race in the act, though notably none of racism. The first is in section 3(1)

(a), which declares it the policy of the Government of Canada to "recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage." In this clause, (an essentialist notion of) race – disconnected from social structures – is made analogous to (simplistic understandings of) culture, and both are subsumed under multiculturalism, much as we saw in some of the educational initiatives participants describe above.

The second mention is in section 5(1)(g), where the minister responsible for multiculturalism may "assist ethno-cultural minority communities to conduct activities with a view to overcoming any discriminatory barrier and, in particular, discrimination based on race or national or ethnic origin." Here, in addition to the conflation of race with ethnoculture, there is a clear absence of a reference to structural racism in favour of "discrimination based on race," with an implicit focus on individual interactions. The way in which this kind of discrimination is to be addressed is apparently through activities put on *by* "ethno-cultural minority communities" to address discrimination against themselves – activities that the minister assists but does not take responsibility for.

There is, of course, no specific attention to Blackness, and no mention of Canada's history of slavery or how its afterlife might produce unique "discriminatory barriers" for Black people in Canada. Instead, Blackness is subsumed under race, race is understood as culture, culture is understood as static (with a one-to-one relationship between "ethno-cultural" groups and "their" cultural heritage), and the act makes culture fungible – that is, a commodity to be shared and exchanged in the interest of social harmony. This is evident in several clauses of the Multiculturalism Act:

Section 3. (1) It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to:

- (*a*) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and *share* their cultural heritage;
- (*b*) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an *invaluable resource* in the shaping of Canada's future;
- (*g*) promote the *understanding and creativity* that arise from the *interaction* between individuals and communities of different origins

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Section 5. (1) The Minister … may:

- (*c*) encourage and promote *exchanges* and *cooperation* among the diverse communities of Canada;
- (*e*) encourage the preservation, enhancement, *sharing* and evolving expression of the multicultural heritage of Canada (Government of Canada, 1985, all emphases added)

This logic – race as culture, culture as fungible – seems to be what informs the post-racism multicultural educational experiences that our participants describe having in their pre-university schooling. This was evident in Valerie's multicultural club with its food and flags, as it is where a white student at University 3 recounts:

> In my high school and my elementary school, frankly we did have a lot of integrative – not multicultural events; I wouldn't call them multicultural because "multicultural" has many implications – but where everyone brought in, from their own home, cultural things. And it wasn't whored-out culture. It was very authentic. They were saying, "This is what my family brought from this region or this place; this is what it means to me, to my family." (U3FGP5)

Interestingly, this participant tries to distance his experience from the label "multicultural" in a focus group conversation during which other participants were somewhat less sanguine about initiatives bearing that label. Nevertheless, what he describes participates clearly in a multicultural project of "sharing and exchange," as well as the logics that produce anyone who is not white of British or French heritage as always already a visitor, hailing from a home that is elsewhere.

Other participants in the study, however, argued that this multicultural tourism approach might not just be crudely reductionist but also actively produce hegemonic ways of thinking that have racist consequences. In a University 2 focus group, a student who identifies as Latinx observes:

> I feel like education is huge, especially when we're talking about like just the way – When I reflect on high school, elementary school – it was the best building ground for these kinds of racial tropes to come up. It was the oversimplified historical tropes. (U2FG1P2)

This student felt that their pre-university educational experiences in schools prior to university failed to support them as a Latinx student, and that these experiences inducted them into a post-racism thinking

that might produce blackface. They build on this idea later with another participant:

> PARTICIPANT 8: I feel like that kind of basic "Oh, we are a mosaic, and Canada – " kind of multicultural education has no impact on [preventing racist behaviour] because you don't go into the history … And it kind of just creates this image of, "we are all equal now, and we are all happy. So it doesn't matter if you appropriate other people's culture because we are all part of the same culture now and we belong to the same mosaic. And if you need to take pieces from somewhere else for a little while, well that's okay."
>
> PARTICIPANT 2: I really like that point. The multicultural stuff is like the perfect breeding ground, because you have a whole bunch of cultures in one room showing their costumes [*sic*], their food, without any political education, or knowledge, or the consciousness to respect one another.
>
> PARTICIPANT 8: Yeah, it's like if you wear your costume [*sic*], maybe I can wear your costume [*sic*] for a day too. (U2FG1)

These non-Black participants are speaking from experience. Both remember and regret having been involved in appropriative behaviour. Participant 8, who is white, admits to willingly being dressed up by her parents "as a Mexican convict" at age eight. Participant 2, Latinx, remembers dressing in a Halloween outfit with a "Rastafarian hat and fake dreads" while in high school. Similarly, a white participant at University 3 says: "I would wear a lot of costumes of traditional outfits of different cultures because I was very much interested in other cultures. But upon realizing how offensive [it was], I stopped that immediately" (U3FGP1). These three students suggest that the logics and licence that produce cultural appropriation are cultivated by the fungibility inherent in post-racism multicultural education, and we have already seen how cultural appropriation becomes appropriation of the body when Black people are the subject of portrayal, since the logics of the afterlife of slavery render not only Black cultural production, but also the Black body itself, available, tradeable, and fungible.

With respect to blackface, then, the influence of post-racism, multicultural education partially explains how these appropriative moments might be produced. If being a good multicultural Canadian means sharing and exchanging (ostensibly static) cultures, then perpetrators might view acts of mimicry as goodwill rather than appropriation. That this might be the case does not, of course, detract from the offence, from individual accountability in the matter, or from the fact that others might engage in appropriation, particularly blackface, for more nefarious reasons. Rather, the point is that the education the perpetrators

have received, and the broader national narratives and policy context within which they are embedded, foster logics that produce and normalize these kinds of acts and render them unproblematic.

Surely there are classrooms where appropriate forms of critical education around racism and even antiblackness are offered in Canadian elementary and secondary schools (often by Black and racialized teachers), though none of the fifty-four student participants who did their pre-university education in Canada could recall having experienced anything like it. And clearly not all students exposed to post-racism, multiculturalist pedagogies engage in blackface and cultural appropriation. Nevertheless, on the basis of what our respondents told us, the reasons they do not participate in blackface are not attributable to anything they learned in their pre-university schooling, while the reasons they do sometimes are. Contrary to any idea that K–12 education in schools might mitigate the occurrence of blackface, then, it appears that in the opinion of both Black and non-Black participants their K–12 education, like the university climate, is implicated in the production of blackface and broader forms of antiblackness. Moreover, antiblack appropriative behaviour is produced precisely through the post-racism, multiculturalist pedagogies that schools might understand as promoting egalitarianism. It is therefore clearly not the case that university students who engage in blackface have somehow failed to embrace what their pre-university Canadian schooling has tried to instill. Rather, as products of that schooling and the particular post-racism, multiculturalist understandings it promotes – indeed, as university students who are ostensibly among the best and brightest graduates of K–12 education – these students are set up to behave in exactly these problematic ways.

Multiculturalism and MLK: Postracialist Silencing and Stifling Black Embodied Knowledge

Post-racism, multiculturalist pedagogy not only informs non-Black students' behaviour at university, but also crucially impacts Black students in negative ways. The members of the Black student organization at University 2 had an extended focus group discussion about how this pedagogy attempted to override both their embodied responses to antiblackness and the knowledge that their families and communities had instilled in them thus becoming postracialist. Instead, it set norms for the post-racism way in which they were expected to engage (or more precisely, disengage) with thinking and initiatives that seek Black liberation. In this conversation, Martin Luther King Jr. featured prominently as a figure around whom

schools created a particular kind of discourse to achieve these ends. Lance tells us:

> We didn't have any anti-racism or equity, or what could pass for it. Well, I guess our Black History assembly. That was terrible! It was always focused on Martin Luther King, but they always just showed him – They created him as a pacifist, he was very passive. That's it! that's the only side they would show. And they wouldn't at least contrast that with Malcolm X. They didn't do anything like that. It was like, "Martin Luther King! Smile, everyone!" Honestly that was it. (U2FGBSOP1)

In addition to the problematic manner that histories of Black struggle are located beyond Canada in this school's Black History assembly, Lance's account of the assembly's postracialist pedagogy that made Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of non-violence first pacifist then passive is instructive. Whether deliberate or not on his part, this slippage parallels Lance's opinion about the way that the revolutionary politics and practice of King are re-storied in schools. For Lance, the way they are taught about Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and work is not intended to inspire students, and particularly Black students, to engage in resistance and pursue Black freedom. Rather, he experienced this pedagogy as a call to be docile. Lance tells us it fails even to employ the very hackneyed, binary ways in which MLK Jr. is set up against Malcolm X (though when this binary is employed, it is usually also with a view towards creating docile Black students by repudiating Black resistance rather than to offer several alternative forms of Black struggle). Students are left without a diverse range of Black historical figures with whom they might identify. Rather, they are presented with a distorted, hegemonic view of a single one.

This sanitized version of MLK Jr.'s work through educational initiatives at school is a phenomenon that all three participants in this focus group understand well, though they attended different schools in different years. Sonji tells us more about how this pedagogy sets the terms for how Black students should behave:

> We are at a point in society where everyone is like, "Equality means that everyone sits down and shuts up. Equality means you don't get mad about issues and we're all Kumbaya." But when it comes down to it, there's still all these issues, but we don't say shit. Sorry. Like we're at a point where our way of talking, our education in high schools, in elementary schools is: "just put a smile on your face no matter what," is the type of education we get. We get the very centralized "Martin Luther King

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> says all Black people and white people should hold hands" but we're not going to ever talk about other things. It's a very one-sided, conditioning way of teaching. … And it's not even a full explanation of Martin Luther King, because they don't talk about his radical days. They kind of talk about it in this very, like, "Martin Luther King taught us that everyone was supposed to hold hands and there was supposed to be no violence and no voice. Like this is the way that they teach Martin Luther King." (U2FGBSOP3)

In this rich excerpt, Sonji argues that Canadian post-racism both produces and is reified by the postracialist pedagogical discourse about Martin Luther King Jr. whereby King is transformed into a smiling, hand-holding figure. Students are initiated into a post-racism view that understands antiblackness as always already a thing of the past, at least in Canada, and therefore that Black people in particular should now also just smile. The effect is that it silences Black students, actively undermines Black dissent, and forecloses on critical discussions about Canada from the perspective of Black people. MLK Jr's non-violent strategy for contesting antiblackness becomes a demand for a kind of civility that ultimately means "no voice."

Complementing this dynamic is the way that many of the adults in schools approach racist incidents. Lance shared an occurrence where an altercation between students became physical when a Black student was insulted with an antiblack slur. The outcome was that the Black student who was the target of the slur was the only one penalized – made to "look like a demon for punching [the aggressor] in the face – like she was a monster!" (U2FGBSOP1). This approach, which fails to account for the historical weight of racist name-calling and punishes Black students who are the target of antiblack abuse, is all too common in anecdotal reports from Black students and families in Canada. It, along with the post-racism, multiculturalist pedagogy instantiated in this MLK discourse, sends clear messages about how Black students are expected to respond (or more accurately, to not respond) to antiblackness directed towards them, and about how much schools care about these racial justice issues.

Impacts of MLK Pedagogy on White and Other Non-Black Students

The consequences of this MLK pedagogy for Black students extend to their experiences at university. First, Black participants reported that many of their non-Black peers carry the hegemonic expectations of Black people inculcated by this discourse. Sonji tells of encountering

this very logic when she tries to contribute to discussion in classes at her university.

> I have been conditioned with Martin Luther King at this university a bunch of times. And I think that it's kind of because when we learn about Black people in Canada [in K–12], where and what we learn about racism in itself is very – … We had a discussion-based class where I see these people three times a week. So I have said some things throughout the year that may have rubbed people the wrong way, because I am not going to give you a filtered view on an experience. … but a lot of people have said, "You have such a negative view" – quote-unquote negative because I guess the Martin Luther King explanation is very positive … I got scolded and basically the whole classroom was against my points and I got called a racist … I got conditioned with Martin Luther King … It's very conditioned: "Martin Luther King and Gandhi said, 'Don't say anything, and smile, and that's how you're going to make change.'" … and they'll try to [say that] I'm being violent … "If you want things to change for you, you're going to have to be more like Martin Luther King." This is the type of stuff that they say to me … And I think that it's weird because it's not even Martin Luther King. "You all didn't even read Martin Luther King! You are getting the grade seven assembly Martin Luther King." (U2FGBSOP3)

Through this account of a communication dynamic experienced at university, which Sonji traces back to the MLK pedagogy of the "grade seven assembly," we are able to learn about the very real consequences for Black people of post-racism, multiculturalist pedagogy beyond their years in K–12. Sonji repeatedly uses the metaphor of being "conditioned" to mean variously how her non-Black peers at university have been inducted through MLK discourse into a set of expectations of Black people, and the ways she is disciplined and muzzled by those expectations. When Sonji speaks from her experience as a Black woman, she is considered to be violent, and to be violating the rules about how she is supposed to feel (Wingfield, 2010) that she is expected to learn from Martin Luther King's life. In other words, as we saw in the previous chapter, she is upsetting the classroom conditions of "safety" demanded by white people (but also other non-Black people, according to Sonji) that protect them from confronting the whiteness of their Canadian subjectivities (Leonardo & Porter, 2010), and therefore from addressing their complicity in Canadian antiblackness. These kinds of expectations constitute profoundly post*racialist* conditions at university. Racist conditions, and specifically antiblack conditions, are advanced under the claim that racism is past, reproducing the terms of Black unfreedom.

Black Students Navigating Postracialist MLK Pedagogy

Though Sonji speaks of the significant distress that constantly having to face this postracialist muzzling causes her, she also says she is able to overcome the conditioning. However, not all Black students as easily resist succumbing to the pressure of post-racism conditioning, which accounts in some ways for the attenuated reactions to blackface that some Black students have. Both Lance and Valerie in this focus group admit to "brushing off" their experiences of blackface, even though they both sensed that something was wrong. Lance speaks about his reaction to seeing pictures of a blackface incident at his university on social media:

> I literally was scrolling. I remember I just saw sadnesses about it … so I was looking at it and I was saying, "Okay. I get why people are mad, but everyone, like, relax!" It annoyed me but it didn't enrage me like I saw a lot of people were … I kind of brushed it off as, like, nothing, which is embarrassing to say. I was annoyed that people thought that it was funny. I didn't find it funny at all. … I thought it was stupid … They are just taking it as if it's, uh, whatever, and they can wear stuff that's a part of me and they can just take it and make it a joke almost. It was a joke to them, and that annoyed me so much, but then I was just like, "Okay. Whatever!" (U2FGBSOP1)

Valerie shares her response to the same incident:

> Well, as I said, some of those people, I was acquainted with them. And I was new at the school, and I didn't want to lose friends or anybody. So I kind of just brushed it under the rug. I didn't really think anything of it, to tell you the truth. Like when I saw it I was like, "Oh, okay. Well, that sucks, but whatever. I have friends," like, you know? … And I only heard it from one side too, like the [white people in my dorm]. I didn't hear from the BSO [Black student organization] or any of the articles or anything. … It kind of sucks because they painted their face black, and like I'm Black. … Like, you know that it's bad, but what can you really do about it? … I feel like they're taking a part of me and making it into a costume … but I didn't do anything about it. (U2FGBSOP2)

Both Lance and Valerie admit to not knowing much "about blackface or my Blackness" at the time of the incident. That is, they did not know the history of blackface, but more importantly, partly due to their school "conditioning" up until that point, they did not have a well-developed

understanding of what it means to be structurally located as Black, and were not consciously politically involved in contesting antiblackness. Nevertheless, they both had negative reactions to the blackface incident – feelings of sadness, annoyance, "it sucks." Despite their cultivated, post-racism consciousness, they both had an embodied understanding of blackface as a performance of Black enfleshment – the appropriation of their bodies and subjectivities. Unfortunately, they had also learned to dismiss this embodied knowledge. They had come to think that there was little they could do to address antiblackness, or even that it is not worth addressing. They therefore resigned themselves to live with the kind of violence it represents.

In the same way that they learned to dismiss their own embodied reactions, they also learned to dismiss Black knowledge passed on to them through their communities and families. While Valerie says that her parents never spoke to her about being Black, she tells of an older brother who did, and who warned her of antiblackness she might encounter in interactions with white people at school. She remembers that she would dismiss him: "I would always be like, 'Why are you saying this? I have so many white friends,' and blah blah blah." In Lance's case, his parents and community *had* educated him about what it meant to be Black and had taught him to be prepared for encounters with antiblackness. Our focus group caused him to reflect on how he had come to discount this education:

> It's weird because my parents did ingrain it in me … my parents definitely educated me on stuff like that. So looking back I don't get how I wasn't – It's not making sense to me right now that it wasn't a big deal, because it's not like I was ignorant of everything, and oblivious, and walking around all sunshine and rainbows and stuff like that. I actually knew! So it is weird to me that it wasn't a big deal. But definitely my parents and my parents' friends let us know what was happening, but I guess – [*trails off*]. You talk, because I am trying to think a little. (U2FGBSOP1)

After thinking about it for a while, Lance ultimately pins the disconnect on how he was taught at school, and the kinds of post-racism relationships he had in which contemporary antiblackness was not understood as a cause for concern:

> I guess that is how I grew up. Like, I knew about things because of my parents, but I guess in school they weren't highlighted. I wasn't surrounded by people who cared, so why would I care? My friends at the time – and they still are my friends now – they didn't care. Why would I care? If it's

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> not a big deal to them, why should it be a big deal to me? But it should. I am not white; I am Black. That's the first thing that should be a big deal because everyone around me who is white would say, "Hey it's not a big deal. You shouldn't worry," [and I would be like,] "Well okay. I guess I shouldn't worry. They are not worrying." But I don't look like them … It's definitely because the people around me weren't making it a big deal, I guess. (U2FGBSOP1)

So the attenuated response to blackface and to antiblackness is, for some Black students, related to the post-racism education they had experienced and that structures their relationships with non-Black people. Both dismiss antiblackness and place the onus on Black people to prioritize a superficial interpersonal harmony. Indeed, Valerie's excerpt suggests that her relationships with white people played into the decisions she made to dismiss her embodied reactions; she did not want to lose friends. Lance felt similarly. He told us that because of his relationships with white colleagues, "At the time I was just kind of like, 'Oh well, I am not getting involved. I don't want people to see me doing this and this and this and that.'" They both felt that keeping their relationships with white people was contingent upon ignoring antiblackness – a reasonable conclusion for them based on their post-racism education. The demand through post-racism MLK Jr. discourse to have and maintain "smiling, hand-holding" relationships with white people comes at the expense of any critical discourse about antiblackness, undermines their embodied and community-based Black knowledges, and constrained their responses to blackface.

It is also clear that not every Black student is affected in this way. For example, Sonji says that this was not her experience. She says that she has "always understood" what was politically at stake in her responses to "Black issues," and always been clear about the limit on how far she would be willing to go to maintain relationships with non-Black persons. She recalls:

> I've always been very aware … I do attribute a lot of it to my mom and my parents because the way of society was very ingrained in me when I was little. A lot of pride was ingrained in me in being different. I might even attribute that to being part of a very proud diasporic community. But even then my mom was very apparent [*sic*] about the way the society works … I remember being young, young; my mom would be washing my hair in the bathtub, my mom would be telling me, preaching to me. And I am too young to understand this. But when you grow up learning this and then you start to pick up what's going on, and then reading his-

> tory and things like that, it kind of made me into the person that I am to where I can go into these university experiences and have this experience being very aware from the start. But my mother would preach. She would be like, "Listen … You're a woman and you're Black. This is how life is … You have to be aware of it, and you have to be able to work around it." So she conditioned me to look for these experiences, but she also conditioned me to speak up in these experiences. So I knew what right and wrong was. (U2FGBSOP3)

The education that Sonji's mother provided was deliberate and persistent, and thereby achieved its intended effect. Sonji attributes to this education her ability to expect, understand, and identify antiblackness directed at her as a Black woman, and to not shy away from participating in contesting these conditions.

Canadian Post-Racism Education in Context: Keeping Black People and Black Ideas Out

It is important to contextualize the specific effects of post-racism, multiculturalist pedagogies on Black students within the histories of Black education in Canada in order to make sense of why and how these persist. From the outset, schooling for Black people in what is now Canada was never guaranteed, and had to be struggled for within a context of white supremacy and Black exclusion. Specifically, the earliest forms of education for Black people in what is now Canada were offered, if at all, with/in contexts of enslavement (hampton, 2020, p. 15; Winks, 1997, p. 55), certainly not envisioning Black freedom.

In post-slavery Canada, despite the assimilationist approaches to education that dominated the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Black people (and people from the Asian continent) were considered unassimilable (Joshee, 2004, p. 131). Therefore, as the Black population grew through the migration of Black Loyalists and fugitives from slavery in the United States, Black schooling took various segregated forms because of the ostensible negative influence that white communities felt Black children would have on their own offspring (Bramble, 2000, p. 99; McLaren, 2004, p. 33). Segregated schooling often existed in practice, even where it was prohibited by law, as authorities generally refused to enforce the law against the will of white parents; and it existed more formally by law where there were larger numbers of Black people, and where Black people did not already live apart from white communities because of de facto segregated neighbourhoods (Bramble, 2000, p. 101; McLaren, 2004, pp. 34–5; Williams, 1997, p. 61; Winks, 1997, p. 363).

Most, though not all, Canadian schools had become integrated by the beginning of the twentieth century, and the antiblackness that had previously worked to exclude Black people from schools altogether now informed their experiences within integrated schools (Bramble, 2000, p. 104). Thus, in integrated schools Black students were still sometimes physically separated from white students and regularly faced overt racism, low expectations, and disingenuous counselling that often caused them to leave school of their own accord – either convinced by what their teachers were telling them or, more often, to escape the stifling racist conditions (Bramble, 2000, pp. 103–4; Dei et al., 1997; McLaren, 2004, p. 34; Williams, 1997, pp. 61, 123; Winks, 1997, p. 388).

As indicated above, the brief turn in the early 1990s towards somewhat more promising paradigms of education, designated as anti-racism education, seemed to occur only at the policy level and was quickly swept away by neoliberalism – or more specifically, racial neoliberalism – which deems these forms of education expensive and superfluous and requires a docile labour force that continues to be stratified by race and gender.

Nevertheless, Black people have always actively resisted the antiblack conditions of education and held out radical visions of schooling not predicated on Black exclusion. During the era of segregated schooling Black communities contested educational antiblackness by petitioning educational and legal authorities, and where Black people – usually Black women – set up schools and other educational initiatives to meet Black students' needs (Bramble, 2000, p. 103; hampton, 2020, p. 17; hampton & Rochat, 2019, p. 152; McLaren, 2004, p. 36; Williams, 1997, p. 62). Though primarily created to address the educational exclusion of Black children, these initiatives were usually open to all, including Indigenous students, and sometimes had flexible fee structures that eased financial barriers (McLaren, 2004, p. 38).

Other iterations of a radical Black vision of education were in poignant evidence at the university level in 1960s Quebec. By this time, post–World War II, it had become federal policy for Canada to financially support international students, including those from Africa and the Caribbean, to study in Canada. The policy was part of a broader colonial approach to development primarily intent on fostering "political goodwill [abroad towards Canada], especially anti-communist attitudes" in the Cold War era (McCartney, 2016, p. 5). Consistent with "keep Canada white" immigration policies, this education policy rested on the expectation that international students would not remain in Canada (McCartney, 2016, p. 5). Notably, this immigration and education policy existed alongside the de facto educational exclusion of Black

Canadians, particularly at the university level where long-standing Black communities in Canada were severely under-represented (Williams, 1997, p. 123; Winks, 1997, p. 387).

It was during this time that Black university students in Montreal from the Caribbean and Africa, in concert with global decolonial movements and the general thrusts for civil rights of the era, organized educational forums for sharing and producing radical, anti-colonial Black and Caribbean thought through several clubs and conferences, including the 1968 Congress of Black Writers at McGill University, each of which brought Black thinkers, writers, and activists to the universities from across the Black diaspora (Austin, 2013).

The 1969 Sir George Williams Affair at what is now Concordia University also took place in this era. Beginning, as it did, with a request by four Caribbean students that the university intervene against what they experienced as a white professor's racist grading practices, it too represented a vision of Black freedom in education. When the university failed to respond appropriately, the complaint developed into a peaceful takeover by Black students and their allies of the university's computer lab (Austin, 2013). The affair ended with a violent police invasion of the computer lab, during which several students were injured and ninety-seven students were arrested – among whom forty-two were Black, some of whom were eventually deported (Austin, 2013, p. 135).

Immediately after the Sir George Affair, several federal MPs sought to have the government halt aid to international students, as part of a broader pushback against the sitting government's less racially restrictive immigration policies meant to meet Canada's increasing labour needs (McCartney, 2016, p. 11). While student protest at Canadian universities by Canadian students (of all backgrounds) had been on the rise since at least the 1930s (Lexier, 2007), international students, a significant proportion of whom were Black, and who would largely be the international students MPs had in mind in relation to the Sir George Affair, were now seen as a "threat to otherwise orderly higher education institutions" that needed to be kept out (McCartney, 2016, p. 12). What I highlight here is the way that the congresses and the Sir George Affair represent radical visions of a different kind of education that embraces Black people and Black thought, as well as the state's active rejection of these Black visions of education in Canada.

Since Canada's labour needs persisted while immigration flows from traditional European sources were drying up, the Black population in Canada grew as Black people grasped these employment and immigration opportunities. The number of Black students in Canadian schools

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also grew, but Black students have continued to face the antiblackness that is endemic to Canadian schooling.

Black educators and Black communities have continued to be vocal and active on various levels, to challenge the inequitable conditions of education for Black students and to bring transformative change to Canadian education systems. Black educators, again often Black women, have worked subversively within the limits of their positions of employment to combat the erasure of Black people in curricula and to challenge antiblack streaming and disciplinary practices (Aladejebi, 2015a; Howard, 2014b). Black families and parents, often mothers, have intervened incessantly for the equitable treatment of their children in schools (Adjei, 2018; Dei & Kempf, 2013, p. 66; Lawson, 2019). Numerous historical and current Black-community-based initiatives have been established over the years to advocate for equitable Black education and to offer supplementary forms of education to address the shortcomings of state schooling. These various actors have signalled the urgent need for K–12 educational change, which would include introducing Black histories and Black Studies into curriculum and establishing alternative schooling options, including Afro/Africentric- and Black-focused schooling.

To return to Black students' experiences, then, it is clear that the small number of students quoted in this chapter are only a very minute sample of Canadian students. They are not intended to be representative in any statistical sense. Nevertheless, that Black students should tell us of these experiences in 2013–14 seems significant against the history of antiblack education and Black educational activism in Canada. The outcomes of these contemporary post-racism, multiculturalist pedagogies are deeply antiblack, and are structured by the contexts that have produced them. Antiblackness has always been a feature of education in Canada, attempting to exclude and marginalize Black people. Contemporary forms of education continue this tradition, seeking to silence Black students, mystify the racist terms of their existence in school and in Canada, and pre-empt their involvement in contesting antiblackness. As such, I claim that post-racism, multiculturalist forms of education and their deeply antiblack outcomes cannot be seen simply as a matter of well-intentioned but inadequate pedagogy, or as a benign failure to create a more critical curriculum. They are, instead, consistent with a long tradition of upholding antiblack structures in education, and determined resistance to radical and inclusive visions of education that Black people have continually offered and pursued. As such, they are a response to the material and political facts of Blackness and Black resistance. They are consistent with Sojoyner's (2013) observation that

education policy and practice "are best understood as attempts to make Black liberation irrational and Black subjugation, its logical converse, commonsensical … the structure of public education is … culpable in the enclosure of Black freedom" (p. 242).

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at post-racism forms of education in contemporary Canada in the pre-university years. It has argued that education is informed by the broader discourse of multiculturalism as expressed in Canada's Multiculturalism Act, as well as by the long history of antiblackness in education in Canada. This education contributes to producing Canadian subjectivities that will understand Canada as having transcended antiblackness. It does violence to Black students in a form of gaslighting, and also by teaching non-Black people how to participate in this postracialist gaslighting. White and other non-Black students who uncritically absorb the messages of this education come to understand antiblackness as no longer an issue in Canada, and therefore to understand efforts to challenge antiblackness as superfluous. Some come to understand blackface and other appropriative acts simply as following the expectation that Canadians "share their cultures" in the interest of social harmony. Others learn to hostilely reject those who speak out unequivocally against antiblackness – in this case, the antiblackness of the university. These are the kinds of non-Black subjectivities discussed in Chapter 3, and the current chapter elucidates how these subjectivities might be produced and/or reified in schools.

At the same time, pedagogies in schools attempt to seduce Black students into post-racism and lull Black students into ignorance and apathy towards the necessary, ongoing struggle for Black freedom in Canada. Black students are disciplined through a postracialist pedagogy that makes antiblackness unspeakable, and they are encouraged to accept relationships with non-Black people on terms that require that they themselves not become politically engaged. Black students subjected to post-racism pedagogies are further taught to negate the embodied and community knowledges that would provide a measure of psychic protection from antiblack hostility, and offer strategies of resistance.

This chapter has also attended to the power of a radical black education outside of school, such as that which Sonji's mother provided. Only a very intentional and determined pro-Black pedagogy that is rehearsed often at home or in community is able to resist schools' negation of Blackness and Black struggle. "The talk" that Black families often have with their children to warn them about interactions with

the police and injustice in the criminal justice system more broadly has recently become topical in mainstream media. Here, as I and other Black educators have long done (e.g., Howard, 2014b; Lawson, 2019), I redouble a call for Black parents and communities to resist postracialist seductions and engage in similar "talk" with their children about what they can expect in their interactions with educators and educational systems, which often begin at a much younger age. This talk would not only address the criminalization of Black children, youth, and their families by schools, but must also address curriculum, pedagogy, and particularly the epistemic violence that takes place under such egalitarian-sounding banners as multiculturalism.

Of course, as we have seen, this is a kind of work that Black families and community organizations have done since the earliest days of free Black presence in Canada. There have been community-based initiatives such as the Black Action Party, Quebec Board of Black Educators, La Maison d'Haiti, and Nous Gen Peyi Tou (Montreal), the Black Education Project, Organization of Parents of Black Children (Toronto), Black Learners Advisory Committee, and the Delmore "Buddy" Daye Africentric Learning Institute (Halifax), to name only a very few. There have been some very notable public successes of this work, such as the creation of an African Canadian Services Branch located within the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and some Africentric programs and an Africentric school in Toronto (though to widespread public dissent, including from the then premier of Ontario; Howard, 2013). At the same time, we must not ignore the less visible but no less crucial effects of this educational activism in sustaining individual Black students like Sonji, and in providing grounds for self-recovery for students like Valerie and Lance. In other words, its salience must not be neglected in the day to day of making Black life possible in schools.

This important work in Black families and communities, and by Black educators in education systems – much of it the work of Black women – must continue both to offer critical, pro-Black spaces of education apart from schools and to advocate for the creation and maintenance of such spaces within state systems of education. Much of our hope lies in maintaining these spaces, and protecting them from infiltration and take-over by hegemonic logics that will again pathologize and do violence to Black students and Black families.

It is heartening that each of the Black participants in the study who admits to having been influenced by post-racism education has now come to more critical understandings. Chapter 9 will address some of the ways that this awakening might happen at university.