



Reading and Misreading Racism

By Dr. Lorne Foster

He may have not been directly referring to the phenomenon of “racial profiling.” But the New Zealand sociologist Augie Fleras did point out that misreading a problem “creates inappropriate solutions, especially when disregarding the social conditions that give rise to negative beliefs and behaviours. Racism, therefore, cannot be understood apart from the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts in which it is embedded and nourished.”

Racial profiling of Blacks by Toronto or other metropolitan police departments is a bad thing. But it is also epiphenomena. That is, racial profiling is bad, but it is only a by-product and derivative of an unspeakable and unspoken social malignancy. So, here is the kicker. Resources for case documentation and inquiry - such as, an "independent police complaints and oversight body" that some otherwise thoughtful people now advocate - will not address the underlying malignancy that causes racial profiling, but only control its symptoms.

In a general sense this means, in order to read the problem of racial profiling appropriately it has to be understood as a topic about power - more expressly, the power of power and the corruption of powerlessness. In this respect, to whatever extent that negative attitudes of metro law enforcement officers and high urban Black crime rates exists they are both precipitated by the “internalization of a world based on unarticulated codes for rank and status.”

In a specific sense this means, if you really want to address the problem of racial profiling in Ontario, then you ought to begin by converging on the power vectors that were ratified on that fateful day - Friday, October 11, 1995 - when the *The Job Quotas Repeal Act* was introduced by the “Commonsense Revolution” of the Harris Conservatives in the Ontario Legislature to nullify the *Employment Equity Act* of 1993, which was just enacted by the previous NDP government.

The Job Quotas Repeal Act was a swift and mercilessly backlash to the impudence of minority equality-seeking that received Royal Assent on December 14, 1995, and affixed the “peripheral status” of Blacks and other people of colour in perpetuity. Moreover, as a direct consequence, the social-psychological landscape of the Great White North has since been strewn with dead and mangled and disease-ridden Black and Brown bodies. Black kids routinely kill each other in Toronto. And Native kids impassively kill themselves in Attawapiskat. While both attempt to annihilate the part of their being-in-the-world that has been debased and humiliated.

Black and Brown kid are now being informally trained to de-sublimate an inferiority complex into a human volcano of self-loathing.

Self-loathing is of course a choice, and a personal responsibility, not a socially determined vocation. But it is also a choice provoked by a structured reality that is logically

prior and external to these kids - who because of their youth and by definition lack the maturity and wherewithal to manage it diminishing effects. In this respect, Black and Native “death rituals of resignation and defeat” are a predictable response to structural circumstances that create a negative relationship between them, and the world around them, based on the unequal distribution of power, privilege, and wealth.

New Group Campaign Against Racism

This is the backdrop and impetus for the recent formation of the *Black Coalition for the Advancement of Ethno-Racial Harmony* (BCAEH) and its “Repeal the Repeal Campaign”.

The BCAEH is a multicultural organization dedicated to addressing substantive issues of power and powerlessness in society through coalition building and strategic alliances. Its goal is to represent the diverse interests of the Black community and provide it with a national presence by creating an organizational framework capable of responding to community issues and needs through inter-community partnerships for the promotion of power-sharing and social justice.

It is in this connection the BCAEH believes the repercussions of the *Job Quotas Repeal Act* have been both tragic and frightening. This Act radically aborted the very embryo of employment equity legislation designed to neutralize hidden cultural bias in the workplace and achieve a representative workforce for the whole. This at a time when Black people were already disproportionately affected by economy-wide restructuring, a shrinking industrial base, and the disappearance of good jobs under the corporate values banner of streamlining and downsizing and amalgamating and de-layering. Then, finally, Friday, October 11, 1995, left no doubt that the increased economic pressure on the Black community, and decreased opportunities for gainful employment, would have profound dysfunctional and erosive effects on the Black family - inspiring Black children in the 21st century to become predators, and mainstream society to further entrench its racial definitions of crime and menace.

All of this also left no alternative for those truly committed to the principle of social justice apart from enter into a new expansion of organizational reason, based on the interdependence of our differences and the need for our reciprocity.

It is in this respect that *The Black Coalition for the Advancement of Ethno-Racial Harmony* is aimed at mobilizing the support of all conscientious community sectors and responsible citizens in the search for appropriate solutions to racism, beginning with the repealing of the Job Quotas Repeal Act, and the establishment of comprehensive societal mechanisms for diversity management and corporate workplace inclusion.

Or, perhaps the last line of the BCAEH mission statement best summarizes its entire counter-revolutionary theses: “Our destinies are tied together.”

Author's Note: All conscientious citizens are invited to become members of the Black Coalition for the Advancement of Ethno-Racial Harmony . The membership fee is \$10 and can be sent to 675 Roselawn Avenue, Suite 501, Toronto, Ontario M5N 1L2. Or call 416-785-4966 for more information.