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ANTI-RACISM

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Unlearning anti-Black racism 101: Stop Canadiansplaining

by Chelby Daigle September 3, 2016October 5, 2021

So what is “Canadiansplaining”? Why should you care? Chelby Daigle explains.

*– **splaining**: a combining form extracted from mansplain, and meaning “to explain or comment on something in a condescending, overconfident, and often inaccurate or oversimplified manner, from the perspective of the group one identifies with”*

So what is “Canadiansplaining”?

Since the rise in media attention given to Black Canadians organizing around Black Lives Matter I have had to listen to a lot of “Canadiansplaining” when I have spoken up about my own experiences of anti-Black racism in the presence of some White and racialized folks. It’s like Whitesplaining but I have experienced it from both White and racialized people who are not Black or Indigenous so I needed to come up with a more “inclusive” word.

“Canadiansplaining” usually entails these people making me aware of how even though Black folks in Canada are subjected to systemic anti-Black racism *“because no one is perfect”* it is not as bad as in the States.

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Sometimes, it will involve telling me how my experience or the experience of Black people in Canada is so much better than that of indigenous peoples.

Whatever is said, the overall message is: SHUT UP and Stop Talking about Anti-Black Racism in Canada.

Here is why “Canadiansplaining” is a manifestation of Anti-Black Racism:

1) It is minimizing the traumatic impact of anti-Black racism in Canada and my and others’ daily experiences of anti-Black racism in this country.

2) It is a form of deflection. It means you don’t have to do anything about anti-Black racism in Canada or the anti-Black racism you are actively perpetuating and someone might be calling you out on. You are basically letting yourself and the entire nation off the hook for “not sucking as bad as you or the nation could possibly suck.

3) It reduces the Black experience in the US to just being victims of racist violence, while ignoring the agency, creativity, ingenuity, and resiliency of Black Americans. Seriously? Like there is a Black President, Black Senators, Black Congresspeople, Black mayors, Black universities, Black businesses, Black writers, Black best-selling country music artists (yes some Black people like country music. We can like any kind of music that we want and be awesome at it!).... the **best-selling Marvel comic book** right now is written by a Black man about Black people in a Black nation.... and there are ample amounts of Black American folks just slayin’ it daily every which way they can.

In Canada we don’t even have a Black cabinet minister and yet our **Prime Minister** is praised for saying it is a “A cabinet that looks like Canada”...I guess people like me don’t look like Canada....

Here’s the thing: When I think of the US, my automatic thought isn’t...”I am so grateful I am not American, it would suck to be Black there.”

Actually, my automatic thought is “Black Ken”.

For a Black girl growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, the US was the only place I could find a Black Ken doll... or ample amounts of Black Barbies... In my child’s mind, the US just seemed like a place that recognized that little Black girls existed and might want to be able to have their Barbie marry a Black Ken doll.

Canada didn’t seem like a country that knew or wanted to know that little Black girls like me existed.

If you must know, a lot of us Black folks in Canada go to the US just to participate in the Black Awesomeness of the country.

So no, I don’t sit around thanking my lucky stars I was born in Canada...a country that **denied my father** citizenship . I am grateful for the privileges my Canadian citizenship grants me but that

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I still remember watching CBC's coverage of the Somalia Affair (trigger warning), when the investigation into the torture and murder of a Somali teen by Canadian "peacekeepers"...torture that they pretty much took selfies of before selfies were even a thing... exposed all this video footage of peacekeepers making all kinds of anti-Black racist statements like it was just a normal thing to do...a *Canadian* thing to do.

This whole ideal of the Canadian "peacekeeper" just blew up in my face....and left me feeling more scared than when white supremacists with Heritage Front tried to take over my neighbourhood (Oh Heritage Days).

I can sing along to the Tragically Hip like any Canadian patriot, I have been a fan since I was wee, but that doesn't mean I always feel safe here...frankly after the Somalia Affair I stopped feeling like I was home, that I could ever be home here.

"I'm on the last American exit to the northland
I'm on the last American exit to my homeland" (Last American Exit, The Tragically Hip)

4) One of the most messed up forms of "Canadiansplaining" is "Well, Black people don't have it as bad as Indigenous peoples"...again usually being stated by people who are neither Black nor Indigenous.

By speaking about our experience of anti-Black racism we are not minimizing the experience of Indigenous peoples. Most of the time, if you need to look up a stat on the overrepresentation of Black people in some horrible Canadian system we get a crash course in just how much worse things are for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Take for example child welfare in Ontario. In Ontario, "black children are 40 per cent more likely to be investigated for abuse or neglect than white children" but Indigenous children "are 130 per cent more likely to be investigated as possible victims of child abuse or neglect than white children." *What the...*

Do Black people need to step up in our solidarity with Indigenous peoples? Damn right we do. And we need to start by addressing our settler privilege-although complicated by the reality that for a whole bunch of us our ancestors had no say in coming to this part of the world if they came as slaves- and our complicity in the marginalization of Indigenous voices, perspectives and realities.

Just because we are Black and experience anti-Black racism doesn't mean we do not do ample amounts of "settlersplaining" about or to Indigenous folks, usually the typical "I came to Canada with nothing and look at me now! What is your communities' problem?" or "We were colonized too but look at us now! What is your communities' problem?" Oh ya, Black Canadians can "settlersplain" with the best of them which is nothing to be proud of.

But we are calling ourselves out and being called out on this stuff. This is a conversation Black people and Indigenous people are having and will continue to have with each other...because, you know, we actually TALK TO EACH OTHER, some of us even belong to BOTH communities (some people have been doing more than just talking).

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And of course, not all Black people reading this blog post are going to agree with me. But that doesn't mean what I am saying isn't real.

As Black people in Canada we have a diversity of opinions on what is going on, we have diverse lived experiences, we don't all agree because there is like almost 800,000 of us and that's just the citizens.

Black folks in Canada don't have a hive mind (that would be awesome though), we aren't the BORG (Yes, Black people can be **Trekkies**, and yes I am one).

But it is the commonality of experiences of anti-Black racism despite the glaring diversity of our communities,from the Pentecostal Christian Jamaican civil servant who came in the 60s, to the hijab-wearing Muslim Somali spoken word artist who was born in the 90s-that is all the more reason for us to be taking this subject seriously. We are experiencing such similar forms of discrimination and marginalization when often all we have in common is our perceived race.

I am talking about anti-Black racism in Canada because it is real, it hurts, it's scary and it's killing us

Someday, I hope to feel like this is my home again… but I can't feel that if *I can't breathe* here.

As Black Canadian lawyer **Anthony Morgan** writes in the article The suffocating experience of being black in Canada : "*Being Black in Canada can sometimes be suffocating. This feeling does not only come from being subject to anti-black racism in multiple domains of social, economic, cultural and civic life in Canada. It is overwhelmingly the result of carrying the exhausting burden of having to convince others of the truth of your lived experience…Blacks in Canada cannot speak about their lived experience and the ongoing injustices they face without being met with silencing indifference, dismissal and sometimes hostility*."

Next time you are about to "Canadiansplain" to me or another lack person, imagine you are putting your hand over my mouth and nose and stopping me from breathing…imagine you are putting me in a chokehold.

Because this is what you are doing with your words.

Maybe that image will help you stop "Canadiansplaining"

Chelby Marie Daigle is an anti-racism educator based in Ottawa. In August, she spearheaded the City for All Women (CAWI)'s Anti-Black Racism Forum in partnership with the Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP), in the hopes of pushing the agenda forward to get systemic anti-Black racism recognized as an issue that needs to be addressed on a municipal, provincial, and federal level.

Photo: Government of Canada http://pm.gc.ca/sites/pm/

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