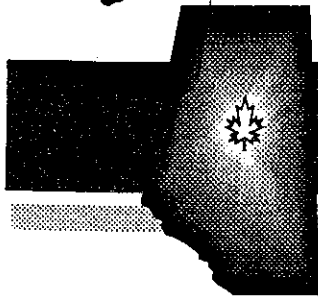


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WE ARE NOT RACISTS BUT...

Dispelling Some Of The Myths About Multiculturalism, Immigrants and Racism

Alberta continues to witness cases of discrimination and ill-treatment against non-whites and some religious groups. Jewish synagogues and cemeteries have been defaced; Aryan Nations have burned crosses in southern Alberta. Natives, Sikhs and Moslems face public ridicule about their dress; turbans have been banned by local legions and there was a long and loud provincial furore against turbans in the R.C.M.P. Workers express fear that immigrants take away their jobs and somehow cheapen the labor force. Vietnamese are made responsible for the existence of ethnic gangs. "Paki" taxi drivers are refused by customers. Even Alberta politicians have joined in denouncing multiculturalism legislation.

Racism is rooted in myths.

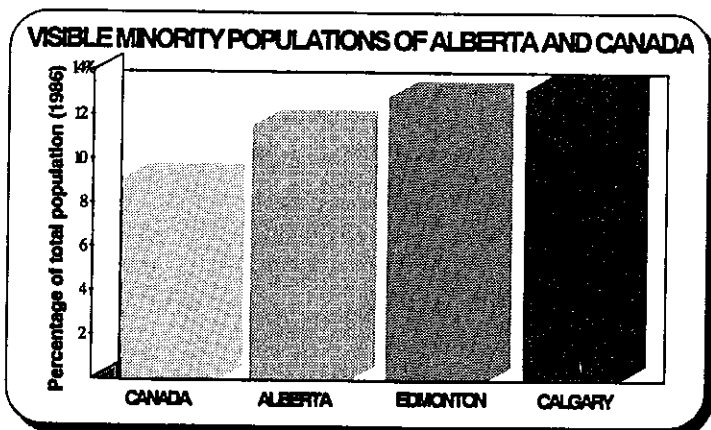
Maria Perez and Teresa Soto work as secretaries in a large insurance firm. Noticing the other secretaries carry on informal conversations during work hours, they started conversing in Spanish. After a week, they were both called in to the supervisor's office and told they were not to talk in Spanish at work any more.

The Common Myths:

MYTH: "Multiculturalism as a policy is divisive. It ghettoizes ethnocultural groups and it is destroying Canadian unity."

REALITY: Canadian unity is threatened by the Anglophone-Francophone debate, the East versus West disparities, the rich/poor inequalities, and urban/rural splits. Multiculturalism, rather than causing divisiveness, is a philosophy of unity because it applies to all Canadians. Many of the ethnocultural groups are national in scope, and participate in activities of national interest.

In 1988, 58,810 immigrants from 170 different countries showed their loyalty to Canada and willingness to be an integral part of Canada, by



becoming citizens of this country. People who belong to these groups hold jobs in the Canadian mainstream, shop in the same stores and supermarkets as everyone else, and attend many of the same public functions. That they attempt to meet their needs by congregating at special events to build support networks, to socialize, to listen to music or attend a dance recital should in no way be interpreted as ghettoization.

"We need to become less afraid of the "R" word. So long as we explode in righteous indignation if someone suggests something we did is racist, we effectively prevent discussion of the issue and silence people of color."

Barbara Findlay - With All Of Who We Are: A Discussion of Oppression and Dominance.

MYTH: "Government is spending too much money to preserve the song and dance of minorities."

REALITY: What is referred to as the "song and dance" of minority groups is in many cases the art of new Albertans. Time spent on these programs are all undertaken by volunteers. Ethnic minority "song and dance" provides alternative entertainment at low prices for many who are too poor to afford the shows offered by the more established groups. The provincial government spends one dollar per capita a year for its multiculturalism programs.

MYTH: "Previous immigrants made it with no help, while today's government is spending millions on immigrant and refugee programs."

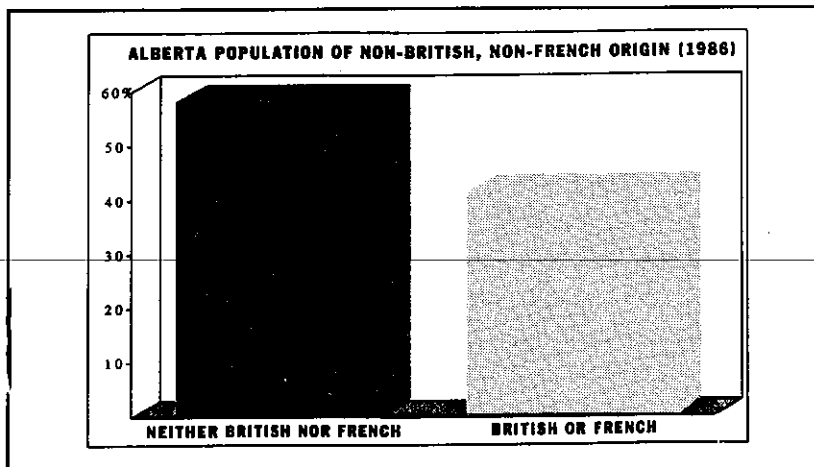
REALITY: During major migrations from Europe in the early years, major incentives were offered to attract immigrants. Assistance included free land, considerable travel subsidy, settlement allowances, start-up provisions, equipment and even wives. Today

most immigrants have to have education and/or money before they are allowed into Canada. Estimated amounts of money brought in by immigrant entrepreneurs in 1987 was \$3.1 billion. The average amount being brought in per immigrant now is \$18,000.00. They contribute to the economy.

MYTH: "Immigrants are a drain on our welfare and education systems."

REALITY: The percentage of immigrants receiving welfare is smaller than the percentage of Alberta-born recipients. Despite their high levels of education, immigrants work at low-paying jobs rather than use the welfare system. Foreign-born persons in Canada bring with them the training received and paid for in other countries. More than one in five of Canada's nuclear engineers are members of a visible minority. Immigrants also bring with them their artisanship working as jewellers silversmiths, sewing machine

operators and knitters (30 per cent are visible minorities). Others are physicists, dentists, physicians and surgeons (11-15 per cent are visible minorities).



MYTH: "We are taking in too many immigrants into Canada."

REALITY: The largest wave of immigration was in the years 1910-1913. Four hundred thousand immigrants came in 1913 alone, while a yearly average of 125,000 came during the 1980s. The numbers set by Immigration Canada for the next five years is 250,000 per year. Immigrants are needed to boost the labor force because of low birth rates in Alberta and also because of the aging of the population. (Alberta's birth rate is 1.7 per cent with replacement rates at 2.1 per cent)

MYTH: "Immigrants take jobs away from Canadians."

REALITIES: Immigrant entrepreneurs created 11,918 jobs in 1987. Immigrants are consumers, they buy houses, appliances, cars etc., thus creating a demand for products which in turn creates jobs. Immigrants also bring their children who attend our schools and create jobs for teachers. Non-English speaking immigrants create a need for English-as-a-second language courses with more spin offs. Many immigrants take jobs Albertans are not willing to take. While many of us sleep peacefully at nights, the toilets and offices of our province are being cleaned by immigrants.

MYTH: "Racism started in the 1970s and 1980s because of an increase in the number of non-white immigrants."

REALITY: Aboriginal people in Alberta were subjected to racism before the influx of non-white immigrants. The Ku Klux Klan was active in Alberta in the 1930s. Racism is not the result of the presence of non-whites but an ideology of racial superiority of whites over non-whites. It exists because one group exercises power and control over another, and because differences are often viewed as "less than" or "inferior".

Harjit Bains Singh recently got a transfer to Edmonton from Sarnia, Ontario, to work as a chemical engineer with a petro-chemical company. In his attempts to locate a good house for his family in the upper-class neighborhood of Riverbend, he was unsuccessful. He was told by a landlord he doesn't rent to East Indians because their smell of curries penetrate into the walls of the house.

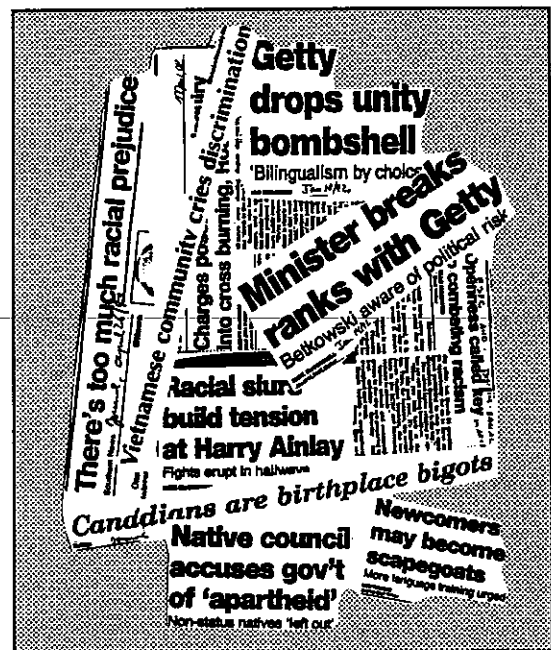
MYTH: "Racism is a problem of non-whites."

REALITY: To say that it is a problem of non-whites is a "Blame the Victim" thesis. This thesis often implies equal opportunity exists for different racial groups.

The fact is 'discriminatory policies and practices are maintained by those who have social, economic, and political power.

MYTH: "Employment equity means reverse discrimination in favor of visible minorities."

REALITY: "Reverse Discrimination" implies non-white workers are being preferred over white workers. The facts show however, it is minority workers who face discrimination in not having equal access to training; in not having their credentials valued; in being denied jobs and promotions despite qualifications and experience. Employment equity helps ensure equitable representation of all groups in the workplace. Many use the "reverse discrimination" label even when one target-member group is hired. They do so because their once exclusive competition is now being opened up to new contenders.



"If I wanted to create a racist society, I would put only a few people in the Ku Klux Klan. I would construct the social world so that all the other white people deplored the Ku Klux Klan...and did nothing about it. Most white people are socialized first of all not to notice racism, and secondly to be unable to do anything about racism when they do see it."

Barbara Findlay - With All of Who We Are: A Discussion of Oppression And Dominance.

"...the inseparable twin of racial injustice is economic injustice...When the underprivileged demand freedom, the privileged first react with bitterness and resistance. Even when the demands are couched in non-violent terms, the response is the same."

Martin Luther King



Racism is often masked:

An economic mask: "We can't afford this program" or "They're taking jobs away from Canadians"

A friendly Mask: "Some of my best friends are...and they agree with me."

A political mask: "Don't Canadians have the right to decide how this country is going to be run? Whatever happened to democracy?"

A traditional mask: "This is the way we do things in Canada and anyone who comes here should accept and do things our way."

A historical Mask: "We have never had problems until now when they started raising a ruckus"

*Robert Gower, National Education Representative,
North Bay Ontario*

Recommended Reading:

Bolaria, B. Singh and Li, Peter S., Racial Oppression in Canada. (Garamond Press, Toronto, Ontario, 1988.)

Hill, Daniel, G., Human Rights in Canada: A Focus on Racism. Canadian Labor Congress.

York, Geoffrey, The Dispossessed: Life and Death in Native Canada. (Vintage, U. K. 1990.)

Memmi, Albert, The Colonizer and the Colonized. (Beacon Press, Boston, 1967.)

Van den Berghe, Pierre L., Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective. (John Wiley and Sons, 1978.)

This issue of Alberta Facts was written by Pearl Bennett and Carlos Pilquil. Lay out and editing was done by Sheila Kushniruk. Funding was provided by Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada. For more information about the Edmonton Social Planning Council, its regular publication **First Reading** and **Alberta Facts**, or other publications, please contact:

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