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# New Canada in One Man's Lifetime

**B**lack writer-broadcaster Fil Fraser, speaking from his own experience, says: "In one man's lifetime, Canada has evolved from a deeply though subtly racist society into a country that's multi-racial, multicultural and so astonishingly diverse it ought to be the envy of the world." His article "Black Like Me" was published in one of Canada's major monthly magazines, *Saturday Night*, earlier this year.

Fil Fraser is a 54-year-old Canadian writer and consultant who remembers when "discriminating" Canadian restaurants "gave off a palpable hostility that seeped into your system as you sat at a table, ignored. No one asked you to leave or told you to stay out; you were just not served."

In 1958, Fraser moved from Montreal to the prairie city of Regina, Saskatchewan. The next year a local real estate firm refused to rent an apartment to him. There was a "whites only" rental policy.

Not many years earlier, Fraser would have shrugged off the experience and moved on to the next listing. But his reaction this time was different and he welcomed the opportunity to "right a wrong."

Fraser took his case to court to prove "you can't do that in this country anymore." He was right. It was the first case of discrimination tried since the province of Saskatchewan's Bill of Rights had been proclaimed earlier that year. Fraser won his case.



Fil Fraser's life has continued to illustrate the evolution toward a more open, tolerant society. In 1960, the Canadian Bill of Rights was introduced — "a milestone for Canada," in Fraser's words.

In 1971, following the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Canada became officially multicultural. For the first time in its history, says Fraser, Canada faced "the fact that there was an important minority in Canada of neither British nor French descent. . . . Multiculturalism . . . assumed the status of hard currency."

In 1977, the Canadian Human Rights Act was passed by Parliament prohibiting racial and religious discrimination; in 1982, the

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was entrenched in the Constitution, thus giving more protection to the basic rights and freedoms of Canadians. And the trend has continued.

For Fil Fraser, Canada is unique because it embraces and encourages more diversity than most countries. Not only is Canada "officially" a multicultural country, it is "by degrees viscerally" so. Multiculturalism is not only enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it is also embedded in Canadian institutions, "and is seeping, far more than we realize, into our collective psyche," says Fraser.

Today, Canadians are discovering the creativity of their social order. In Fraser's words, if Canadians can

Fil Fraser receiving the 1978 Alberta Achievement Award for Film-Making from Provincial Premier Peter Lougheed.

make it possible "for people of every kind to live together in reasonable harmony, we have a message for the world. The problems of this shrinking planet are problems we are solving in Canada."

During the 1950s when Fil Fraser was invited to a "mainstream event" it was because he was "exotic." In the sixties and seventies he was the "token black." But today when people call, Fil Fraser knows that it is really he they want. "Not bad for a kid who grew up . . . thinking someone had put him on the wrong planet."