

"It is the responsibility of our institutions of higher learning to combat the fear or the absence of conscience that allows atrocities to occur, and prejudice to live on and flare up. We must ensure that our students develop the capacity to be social critics so that, for example, they know the difference between political or ideological literature and hate literature. We must teach them to think carefully about the highly complicated issues that often surround or obscure prejudice . . . We must make them aware that the fight for human rights is never-ending, and that in aspiring to all kinds of justice and freedom in their lives they are fulfilling their duty to humanity in the noblest way."

H. Ian Macdonald,
President's Introduction, The
Harry S. Crowe Memorial
Lectures, "Anti-Semitism: A
Historical and Contemporary
Perspective"
(13 November 1982)

3. Perceptions of Racism on Campus: A York University Survey

[This part of the Report describes how the Committee sought to inform itself on the nature and extent of racial incidents and racist attitudes on campus, and of the perceptions of the student community on the subject. The Report describes and evaluates data collected through a survey of students and from the observance of graffiti.]

As part of its mandate, the Committee undertook to investigate if and how racism occurs on campus and the problems resulting from its manifestation.

Little information could be gathered from existing sources as to the extent, nature and perceptions of racism as it relates to students—the main constituency of the University. In view of the lack of data, the Committee decided to sponsor a study to be conducted among the students themselves to determine if and how racism affected their lives on campus. This survey is the first on the subject of racism ever undertaken in a Canadian university.

The survey encompassed 900 third- and fourth-year students in the Faculty of Arts and another 401 students in Atkinson courses at the same level of study. The survey was conducted at the time of registration in September, 1984.

It was determined that the sample was fairly representative of the overall student populations in the respective Faculties. Of the students responding, two-thirds of the sample were 23 years of age and younger while 55% were women. 80.8% were born in Canada, with the majority of the rest being born in East Asia, Europe and the Caribbean.

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of groups within the sample surveyed. These figures show that approximately one in four of the respondents was non-White.

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of ethno-cultural backgrounds of Canadian-born students.

Both sets of figures were utilized to compare the perception and experience of racism among different groups.

As the characteristics of the sample approximate those of the total student population at York, the Committee believes that these results reflect the experiences, opinions and perceptions of the students of York University.

About 3% (or 39) of the students indicated that they had been the object of a racial incident at York. Some of the 39 reported more than one experience, and therefore 63 incidents were recorded.

Of the 39 students who reported experiencing racism, the majority (28) were non-White. East Indians and Blacks, the two largest non-White groups on campus, experience racism more than do other non-Whites. Not one of the 12 Canadian Native students indicated an experience of a racist incident. Eleven White students (five Jewish and six European) reported racial harassment.

By and large, the allegations of racism of students centre about verbal insults and name-calling by other students and derogatory statements with a racial or ethnic connotation made by members of the teaching staff. A few professors and teaching assistants are specifically accused of making racist and irrelevant statements about those groups who can be considered minority groups (Third World and other foreign students, non-Whites and Jews) within the context of the University. Of the twenty-five incidents involving teaching staff, eight specifically alleged that professors do not grade non-White students in the same way as White Canadian students.

Locations of racist incidents were classrooms, administrative offices, and residences, with the library and cafeterias also mentioned. Students were most often mentioned (24 situations) as the perpetrators, followed by professors (17), tutorial leaders (8), and administrative staff (8). Other members of the York staff—library, main-

tenance and security personnel—were referred to in very few instances.

While the overall figure of 39 or 3% might be thought to be a relatively small number as compared to the total numbers of students surveyed, the complaining students have been subjected to painful and embarrassing encounters which have no place in a university.

As to perceptions, fully 79% of the sample were not aware of racist incidents on campus. Even students who are themselves of ethnic, particularly European background, cannot cite examples of racism at York. Yet, 78% of these same students believe racism to exist at York. Therefore, a large number of students believe that racism takes place at York, but cannot cite examples.

Most of the roughly 20% who can cite examples are non-Whites. Two out of every three Black students, one out of every three East Indians and one out of every four East Asians are aware of racist incidents. The most frequently cited example was a specific incident relating to the harassment of a Black graduate student in the York apartments. Other examples included the incidents named by the 39 students above and incidents involving their friends.

The survey found that in general students have not thought a great deal about race and ethnic relations. 60.2% of the respondents gave "no opinion" to the statement that the University has not done enough to eradicate racism on campus. One-third expressed no opinion about whether non-White students exaggerate the issue of racism or carry a "chip on their shoulders." This may mean either that many students really have no views about such statements or that they are expressing caution in not wanting to criticize the non-Whites on campus.

TABLE 1
White and Non-White
Students in Sample

	#	%
White	960	73.8
Black	82	6.3
East Indian/ South Asian	75	5.8
East Asian	157	12.1
Canadian Native	12	.9
(Others, No Response)	15	1.2
Total	1301	100

TABLE 2
Ethno-Cultural
Backgrounds of
Canadian-Born Students

	#	%
British	314	44.6
Italian	144	20.5
Jewish	84	11.9
Chinese	15	2.1
Other European	104	14.7
Other	43	6.1
Total	704	100

Only two statements elicited relatively low "no opinion" responses. One was the statement which asserted that the University should take steps to relieve racism (18% had no opinion). The second statement suggested that racism would not exist were it not for "troublemakers" (16% had no opinion).

The questionnaire also asked if there was more, less or about the same level of racism at York as elsewhere and 34% gave no opinion. 39% claimed that racism was about the same, 19% said less and 7% thought more.

Generally speaking, the survey results suggest that few students are really aware of racism, being unable to cite examples. In addition, their level of perception of issues related to racism is not very high. This holds for a considerable number of non-Whites as well.

Three questions borrowed from another earlier survey in Toronto were used to attempt to measure the degree of prejudicial attitudes on the part of respondents. The survey suggested that approximately 10% of the student body exhibit some degree of racism in their attitudes towards non-Whites. The overwhelming majority of this 10% group are White students, but a few non-White students also exhibited racist sentiments.

While about 10% of the student body are considered to exhibit some degree of racist sentiment, almost twice that many express tolerant views. In analyzing the responses to questions phrased in a manner to elicit potentially prejudicial views, fully 19% of the sample take a strong position against racism. The majority of this group is White.

Overall, the survey suggests that most racism on campus consists of verbal harassment. No reports of physical assault were received. Generally, racial incidents involve other students and members of the teaching staff.

Most students have no views on or experience with racism. About 10% have themselves racist attitudes while 19% are extremely tolerant in their views. In comparison with studies in the general population, the percentage of students with racist attitudes is 5 to 9 percent less. More generally, the issue of racism is of some importance to only about one-third of the sample.

Suggestions from students as to how to eradicate racism include the establishment of a human rights centre, better screening before staff is hired, and a University-wide sensitization and education programme.

In February and March 1986, a survey of graffiti in many areas of the University was undertaken. In all, 250 items of racially motivated graffiti were found over a two-month period of time. The graffiti can be categorized into the following themes:

- race and sexuality
- race and violence
- race and economic status
- race and stupidity and other negative stereotypical views of groups

Examples in the first category included references to race and sex, for example or the size of sexual organs. Such examples occurred 40 times. Violence against identifiable groups included "Kill all Pakis, Chinks, Italians, Niggers and Jews before they take away our jobs." Such examples occurred 50 times. There were 23 Nazi swastikas.

Economic status and race are also related as in the message "Ethnic groups take our jobs and the welfare line is getting whiter." Twenty three such cases were found. In 70 examples, various negative traits, such as stupidity, were attributed to specific groups. These included items such as "Jews are not in Fine Arts because there is no money in it" and "Blacks never wash."

All of these and other examples suggest a strong racial bias on the part of the writers. The potential for psychological harm to the minority groups who use the hallways and washrooms is significant.

What is clear is that in all cases, racial insults and racial denigration are the aim of the graffiti writer. Underlying this form of racial harassment are strong attitudes of racial prejudice. People who go to the extent of writing on washroom walls are very committed to their bigotry. One social scientist in trying to analyze the motivations of graffiti writers comes to the conclusion that ". . . writing on walls is at bottom the expression of aggressive and destructive wishes . . ." (Harvey D. Lomas, "Graffiti: Some Observations and Speculations," *Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 60, No. 1, 1973, p. 85).