

opinions

BLACKS ON BLACK

Just recently Joan Jones wrote an article appearing in *The Chronicle Herald/Mail Star* about "White Privilege". Ms. Jones talked about the advantages white people have because of their skin tone; a few of the following are just a small sample. One, white people are generally found in the company of their own - from work, to church, to social gatherings. The reasons are two-fold: Black businesses are striving to succeed so their hiring options are limited; and historically, white people have excluded Blacks from their social circles. For the most part, that remains the practice today. Second, contributions made by whites to our society will

always be recognized and celebrated. The Nova Scotia school system, and even our Dalhousie University demonstrates this - daily. Third, whites have abundant choices for entertainment. Downtown clubs, theatre, art galleries; few offer alternative programming for their Black patrons. In November 1992, a similar article appeared in *Chatelaine* magazine by Cecil Foster entitled "Why Blacks Get Mad". A response to his article compelled me to write this column.

I vaguely remember reading the article; Mr. Foster talked about what it was like growing up Black in Canada. Issues he addressed would not be foreign to the majority of

readers of BLACKS ON BLACKS: enduring name calling, arriving for job interviews which had already been filled, being looked at skeptically by police officers and other law enforcers. He also brought to reality our brothers and sisters who mistakenly believe that once you have crossed the class barrier, you automatically cross the race barrier. WRONG! It does not matter how much cash is flowing, the green cannot erase the black. But before I get sidetracked, I want to address a response to the article "Why Blacks Get Mad" by a self admitted white person.

R.C. Menard believes that Mr. Foster's Black privilege allows him to conveniently "put every negative thing that has happened in his life into one file folder labeled 'racism'". Menard has endured name calling, and many other deplorable acts, but

files them under "that's life". I too have made it a habit of claiming racism for any negative occurrence in my life. Unfortunately, it is a matter of conditioning. In this fair white north we call Canada, employment, education, and housing have historically limited their access because of race. I would relish the opportunity to file the items analogous to my not getting a promotion, or not being accepted into a particular university program under "that's life", but in our society, especially in Nova Scotia, the majority of time I allege racism, I make an accurate assessment. I would also like to note that I possess the maturity to recognize when I lack certain qualifications and when my marks limit my participation to the above examples.

So what is the point? The point is not to absolve white people who believe that our assertions of racism

are unfounded because they too, have met similar hardships. White people represent the 'greater society' therefore their struggles cannot be comparable to ours. Economic decisions are based on white input which ultimately hamper our development. So please be informed that Black privilege does not include being able to make excuses for society's definition of our shortcomings. What it does include is our strength in developing our own entertainment and churches; it also includes our own celebrations, and recognition of our contributions to this society. Do not second guess your intimate feelings about why society chooses to ignore you. And do not allow white society to affirm that you simply do not meet their standards. The above expressions by R.C. Menard are simply another reason why Blacks get mad.

Quenta Adams

Changing institutions layered with power and privilege

I read Mary Jane Hamilton's article, "Accentuate the Positive", not once but twice out of sheer disbelief that logic could be so short in an article so long. This self-appointed apologist (for white men) argues affirmative action is "special treatment" for so-called minorities. She thinks justice can be achieved without a price and those of us at the bottom strata of society should jump with glee when a white man announces he is pro-feminist. NOT!

The liberal bias that informs her article distorts the essential purpose of affirmative action legislation. Canadian society confers status and privilege on certain groups according to their race, gender, sexual orientation and economic class. Her argument misses the point because it is premised on an old and flawed vision of equality. This vision sees

equality in terms of treating all people the same. But this idea fails to address the realities of a racist (sexist etc...) society like Canada. Her focus on "individuals" allows her argument to seem plausible. Individuals are abstract conceptions of simple liberal minds unable to deal with the complexity inherent in today's multiracial society. What is an individual, anyway? Are they rich, poor, male, female, able-bodied or differently-abled, Native, French or English, Black or white? Once you add these facts the picture becomes more complex. People with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and women have to be treated differently in order for them to be treated equally because they are all members of groups that are oppressed because of who they are. It is NOT special treatment that affirmative action is designed to give. It

is basic respect and dignity that has been denied to certain groups because of irrelevant facts like race, gender, etc.

One could argue that middle and upper class white males alive today should not pay for their ancestors' crimes. I have always found this a curious argument. When governments change hands, the new administration inherits the debts and problems of the previous administration though they have done nothing to incur those debts or problems. The status white males enjoy was built on the actions of their ancestors. They have done nothing but be lucky to be born into a society that privileges them. They did nothing to make this a reality so any benefits incurring should not be theirs either.

Although I agree affirmative action in itself cannot end oppression,

I still believe it is a necessary start. Historically, white middle and upper class men and women exploited, killed and yes, stole from those of us that they decided were less human. As the old story goes, years and years of our labour, sweat and blood has indeed built what many white people now take for granted as rightfully their own. This shameful history has often been distorted and silenced to distance white people from the evil actions of their ancestors. No one is born inherently evil, racist, sexist or homophobic. However, some people have and continue to participate in the privilege derived from the evil actions of their ancestors. (Of course I am assuming that you agree that things like slavery and the genocide of people are evil actions.)

For those of us that are now seeking justice in institutions layered with

power and privilege our history is particularly relevant. Ms. Hamilton chose to turn a blind eye to this fact. Her article was more concerned with defending the ill-gotten wealth of some white men. In defense of this privilege, she is more bothered about minorities getting jobs than she is about redressing white corporate exploitation and privilege. Affirmative action is hardly a major concession when set against Canada's less glamorous treatment of people of colour and women. The challenge remains to us all to demand justice that is informed by a more accurate history and that recognizes the complexities of our society. As Audre Lorde aptly stated, "The master's tools will never destroy the master's house."

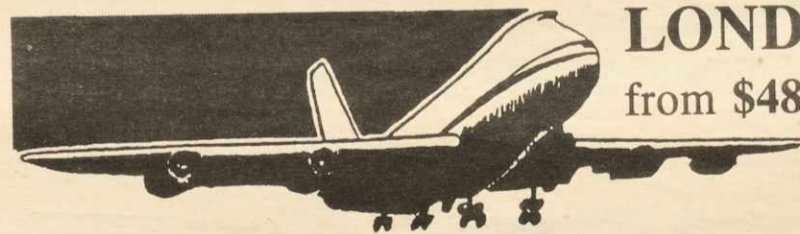
Ivy Kusina & John Burchall

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