

Black in Quebec

Systemic Racism in Our History

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The purpose of this infographic is to display some of the many historical examples in which racism has been perpetuated on a systemic level in Quebec and Canada, particularly through laws and policies. It takes into account different racialized groups who have been negatively affected by these policies as well as discrimination that has also occurred on the grounds of gender, physical ability and more.

What do we mean by SYSTEMIC RACISM?

Systemic Racism is discrimination based on one's race or ethnic origin that is embedded in the established systemic institutions in which a society functions.

Indian Act (1867-Present)

The Indian Act gives the Canadian federal government full control over matters pertaining to one's First Nations' status, bands, and reserves.

It came about as a way to assimilate First Nations people to Canadian settler society through enfranchisement which is the legal process of stripping someone's First Nations status. Losing this status would mean losing the right to live on the reserve, the right to inherit family property, treaty benefits and health benefits.

"The great aim of our legislation has been to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of the Dominion as speedily as they are fit to change."
- John A Macdonald on the Indian Act, 1887

Efforts to abolish the Indian Act have been met with resistance because it's the only legislation that affirms the constitutional relationship of First Nations peoples to Canada and Canada's obligations to them. Most notably, "The White Paper" unveiled by then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in 1969, it proposed that First Nations people be given the same equal status as any Canadian. However, it was heavily opposed by First Nations communities as it failed to address their special rights and historical grievances therefore, it was abandoned by the government. Throughout the years, the Act has been amended. Nonetheless, its influence over the First Nations' way of life has remained a subject of debate.

Olivier Le Jeune

The first recorded slave in Quebec. Born in Madagascar in 1621.

The Raudot Ordinance of 1709

A document which legalized the purchase and sale of Indigenous and Black slaves in New France. The practice of slavery had already begun however.

Chinese Head Tax (1885-1923) and Chinese Immigration Act (1923-1947)

Shortly after the construction of Canadian Pacific Railway completed, in 1885, the Chinese Head Tax enacted by the Federal government levied a head tax at any Chinese person entering Canada. Beginning at \$50 in 1885, it was raised to \$100 in 1900, and to \$500 in 1903.

The purpose was to restrict Chinese people from immigrating to Canada. In 1923, the Chinese Head Tax was superseded by the Chinese Immigration Act, also known as Chinese Exclusion Act, in order to further exclude Chinese people on the basis of race. The Act remained in effect until 1947, the same year when Canada signed the United Nations' Charter of Human Rights.

However, in the same year, in a speech to Parliament, Prime Minister Mackenzie King stated:

"... Canada is perfectly within her rights in selecting the persons whom we regard as desirable future citizens. . . . Large-scale migration from the Orient would change the fundamental composition of the Canadian population."

Immigration Act (1906 & 1910)

The Immigration Act of 1906 restricted the flow of new immigrants to Canada by broadening the categories of prohibited immigrants, giving government officials enhanced powers to make arbitrary decisions on admissions, and creating a formal deportation process. Populations deemed "less suitable" were left vulnerable to the prejudices held by decision-makers in the admissions process and could be deported within two years of landing.

These powers were enhanced by the Immigration Act of 1910 which gave the governor-in-council the power to deny the landing of anybody deemed "unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada".

West Indian Domestic Scheme (1955)

Previous to 1955, Immigration to Canada by non-whites, including many people in the Caribbean was tightly controlled. Social prejudices played a big role as they were deemed unfit for life in Canada.

After continued pressure, the Federal Government brought forward the West Indian Domestic Scheme. It allowed for women from Commonwealth Caribbean nations to immigrate to Canada so long as they spent their first year working as domestic workers. While this policy made it easier for some West Indians to come to Canada, it also spoke to how Canada viewed people in the West Indies. Within it are racist, sexist, and exploitative assumptions about the role people from the West Indies were meant to have in Canadian society. These assumptions also created barriers for women trying to move into other fields of work after their one year of employment as a domestic worker.

Why is history IMPORTANT?

History provides a unique perspective on the actions and series of events that led to the current state of our world today. Its lessons should be taught and remembered so that we, as a society, can work together in combating systemic discrimination in Quebec and Canada. The content presented in this infographic are just some examples of where systemic racism can occur. In this edition, the focus is on some of the policies enacted in our country that have functioned to systematically against discriminate people on the grounds of race amongst other things. While many of the policies (but not all) cease to exist, their legacies still impact communities today.