

Stigmatization And Discrimination Against North Africans In Canada

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Introduction

Historically, the settlements in Canada began with the displacement of the native population when colonizers migrated to the region. Canada has a diverse population, which it may encourage today; however, this has not always been the case. Grouping people based on their race, gender, ethnicity, or any other characteristic is known as stereotyping. Creating a certain belief, thought, or attitude about any group without any real experience is known as prejudice. When this attitude or thought drives action, it is known as discrimination. Importantly, how the discriminated group perceives these actions is known as stigmatization. Canadian history is marred with racial discrimination and events related to segregation and racial discrimination (Little, 2016). Many sociologists have provided theories to elaborate on and understand the underlying ideas of these behaviours in society. This paper will discuss the stigmatization and discrimination against North Africans in Canada and discuss the work of Canadian sociologists in this regard.

Historical Perspective

When the British colonized North America, they were able to establish trade relations with the indigenous people of the region. Prejudice prevailed on both sides and later, the relationship deteriorated between them. With the idea of racial supremacy in the West, various [immigrant groups](#) were viewed differently on their importance, with white Anglo-Saxon British rated most highly. People of Asian and Black origins were considered inferior, and significant prejudice against them hindered their integration into society (Palmer & Driedger, 2011). Enslaved Africans were the backbone of the economic activities in the colonies. The enslaved Africans worked long, strenuous hours in a variety of jobs ranging from household servants to agriculture workers and other professions. Slaves were owned across Canada by people from all walks of life as it was considered a status of wealth. The law enforced the legal status of a person as a slave by documenting their sale, purchase, and ownership. The idea of free labour meant that the colonizers could increase their profits by reducing the cost of labour. They were bought and sold like commodities and enslaved as they were considered cheap labour. They were even bartered at times for items such as sugar, tobacco, timber, and rum. (Henry, 2016).

The racial discrimination the Africans faced undermined them and even affected their brain function. Discriminating behaviour impacts the attainment of cognitive skills, stability in family and

relationships, and the willingness to abide by the rules. Race gives the first impression of a person's identity in social interaction without someone knowing the person. Racial stigma leads people to think that others will not only judge them based on their wealth or education but also their race, which impacts their well-being (Loury, 2005).

Even when slavery ended, the prejudice and the psyche that they were an inferior race did not end. Prejudice led to discriminatory laws and social practices. Discrimination led to segregation in various facilities such as education, housing, health, and entertainment. It also gave no right to people considered inferior to have the right to vote and have a career in public office (Palmer & Driedger, 2011). Discrimination exists on both individual and institutional levels, defining what people can or can not do based on their race, thus limiting their importance and contribution to society. Economic disparity in the form of unemployment, income inequality, and poverty was only faced by discriminated groups in Canada (Henry, 2016).

Erving Goffman

Erving Goffman was a leading sociologist who used symbolic interactionism to describe his dramaturgical model of self. He proposed that the self performs or acts according to various roles and interactions, just like actors on the stage. In his work, *"The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life"*, Goffman described that human performances are calculated and never truly reveal all of it. Therefore, the self is all about managing impressions and appearances. In his second important work, *Asylum*, he discusses the self-destructive behaviour of individuals who are held captive by an institute, belief, or even their mind. Their captivator controls, moulds, monitors, and regulates them, stripping them of their identity. The inhumane, mortifying treatment of the people in the institute, such as beating, stripping, and humiliation, sets the psychological stage for the destruction of self. It is important to note that the word institute here is referred to more metaphorically, in the sense of an authority that ensures conformity of behaviour. He explored the idea of stigma, explaining how some were visible, such as physical disability, and some were hidden, like experiencing racial discrimination.

Goffman also observed that impressions of the self portrayed in various situations are manipulated and staged to achieve gain and hide stigma and secrets. These performances can be individual or by a group that tries to maintain a certain definition associated with a situation. Individuals who consider themselves part of a group have established a relationship with its members whereby each one of them depends on the other to uphold certain behaviours. In this relationship, they also have to support, cooperate, and maintain appearances according to situations and roles. This group is essential to various aspects of society, where groups have a unanimous narrative to control opportunities, truth, and information from the other group. Groups conform to certain etiquettes, hierarchies, and standards of practices to maintain their status and respect in the eyes of the other group. This group can be considered a performer and the other one as their audience (Garner & Hancock, 2014).

In his work titled “*Interaction Order*”, Goffman has summarized the normative foundation of society. To conceptualize society, it can be assigned three attributes: society has an organized structure, the epistemology of making sense of the world around us, and the norm or standard of behaving in particular social situations. These social situations are the stage where interactions unfold. Our lives are lived in presence of others, therefore, they are essentially interactions in a larger cultural and societal context. At the heart of interaction are cognition and language (Garner & Hancock, 2014).

“Goffman’s work *Stigma: A Management of Spoiled Identities*” describes the nature and source of stigmatization. This developed an understanding of how stigmatized groups and individuals manage and avoid demeaning and discrediting incidents. Goffman’s description of stigma is rooted in the relationship between races, segregation, and knowledge of sociology. Goffman defined stigma as an attribute or quality that discredits a person. It is a perspective about social identities that emerge as a result of social interactions. Although stigma is experienced by a person who has faced discrimination, it is the interaction or relationship between a normal person and a stigmatized person, sadly a negative one. These interactions are largely guided by the norms of society (Tyler, 2018).

Looking at the ideas presented by Goffman, one can understand the colonized, slave-based society of Canada. The slave traders and owners were a group that ensured conformance and ensured certain behaviour of slaves. If their group could not show kindness towards the slaves, this was what they all did. Their discrimination led to the stigmatization of Africans who had been working as slaves. These people, even today, suffer bias and have long-term social, economic, and well-being challenges.

W. E. B. Du Bois

Sociologists have long taken much interest in the study of the race for its volatile, uncertain, and prominent presence in society. W. E. B. Du Bois is a key contributor as a sociologist in the study of what is considered the race problem. His work describes race with a philosophical foundation, and therefore, as other people introduced fields of political philosophy or social philosophy, he introduced race and philosophy. Among many things, Du Bois was a historian, critic, philosopher, and sociologist. He is considered a leading sociologist to study race as he provided accounts that constructed the idea of race and racial differences and how they govern power and systems of social dominance. He termed the racial problem as the negro problem and contributed both in the fields of sociology and philosophy.

Du Bois described the social problem as a failure of social groups to adhere to actions that lead to failure to acquire the desired ideals. He described the negro problem as a cluster of social problems as there were so many failures that inhibited their inclusion in the masses and the group life of white Americans. He described two reasons for negro failure; first was the prejudice and discrimination, and second was their cultural backwardness. Racial prejudice against black Africans caused discrimination whereby they could not be included in group life even if their living conditions were good. The cultural backwardness emerged because of economic discrimination, lack of exposure to art, and lack of

exposure to subtle etiquettes of social life (Gooding-Williams, 2020).

In his work "*The Souls of Black Folk*," he explains that people's behaviours are an outcome of their lived and felt experiences. He coined the idea of double consciousness to describe how black Africans process and behave in society. He elaborated that Africans look at themselves through the eyes of others, which only shows disgust and amusement, to measure the worth of their soul and self. Therefore this racial prejudice caused stigmatization leading to the negro problems and failure.

In "*The Study of Negro Problems*", Du Bois described race and racial identities. He begins by discussing how there are three distinct physically appearing races: white, black and yellow. He states that race is not just the physical appearance and colour of skin. From here, he furthers the description of racial identity by stating that there are eight spiritually separate races that emerge from the causal construction of historical and social factors. These factors include shared history, law, religion, thought process, and common aspirations of the group. He termed spiritually distinct races of people having a common history, common language, common traditions, and common strivings as one race. Du Bois's work made it clear that race is an established social fact that, like other institutes of society such as marriage or family, developed particular mental states and cognition levels (Garner & Hancock, 2014).

Du Bois used the foundation of politics to discuss the theory of race. He described that white people in America have a privilege and social status. This privilege offered them psychological compensation even if the white people were working low-income jobs. Secondly, it also united the white workers and capitalists in a socio-political alliance against the black workers. Such privilege led to discrimination in economic opportunities where, for instance, only people of white origins could be hired in the police force. This social machinery of power and privilege exploited the economic opportunities for black people (A. Morris, 2019).

To further explain the social status of white privilege, Du Bois, in his work "*Dusk of Dawn*", explained that the white wants to take control of the blacks. He discussed how this dominance was being legalized and legitimized, as white supremacy taught them that they were superior to black people. In the post-industrialized society, the earlier notions of describing society only in economic and political terms could no longer suffice. Therefore, Du Bois gave three concepts to describe the society in which scientific knowledge was increasing. Knowledge of social laws can help in organizing better plans for society, understanding of limits obtained from this can help in safeguarding in case of failure, and a moral framework can help when immoral action emerges and causes distress. He used these three ideas to explain that social laws generalize various aspects of society, including poverty, suicide rate, and the nature of crimes committed by an identified group of society. He believed that this knowledge could help in making social reforms (A. D. Morris, 2008).

Human society, even though considered as a whole, is made of many distinct units; therefore, it is not the science of society but the science of human actions that makes the whole society. Societal laws limit and inhibit choices and human capability to reach their full potential. As Goffman also

mentioned, there are institutes in society that control the behaviour of other groups and make them conform to certain standards. The same is given by Du Bois, who talks about social law as a factor in controlling behaviour and opportunity. Therefore, social laws set a boundary on the availability of chance and choice, and chances for social groups are limited by the law.

Conclusion

Sociology theorists have taken much interest in the role of race in social behaviour and organization. Race has been defined to include multiple aspects, such as physical appearance, as well as cultural and historical identities. Both Goffman and Du Bois have described how there are roles and groups in society that have a certain power. These powers let them control the opportunities for the other groups in society. Importantly, in the context of Africans being in large numbers in both America and Canada as a result of colonization, there was a social problem to deal with once slavery ended. The long period of slavery had established the prejudice against Africans so deeply in society that it manifested as discrimination against them in every walk of life. They were limited and cut out from the economic, social, political, and cultural masses of society. The long history of discrimination stigmatized the black population, giving rise to dual consciousness whereby their cognitive processes were largely impacted by what others thought of them. Even though Du Bois argued that black people could outperform whites in any walk of life, the social laws did not provide them the chance to do so.

The prejudice and discrimination that have been experienced by black Africans in North America have generated a long-term impact on that group. Over years their behavioral and genetic legacy has been altered, they as a group have attained certain behaviors to develop psychological defense and stigma to absorb and live in a world of constant discrimination. The issue remains, as also outlined by Du Bois and Goffman, that the groups that hold power in society do not let anyone join their ranks. Therefore, the dilemma lies in the fact that even if black people achieve much against the odds, they still are not recognized on the same level as white people in society.

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