Overcoming Historical Factors that Block the Quest for Educational Equity in Canadian Schools

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Remedying school inequities in Canada requires actively confronting the challenges connected to Canada's national identity and history. These challenges uphold historically rooted, ongoing inequities that are tied together by three themes: the legacy of colonialism and the displacement and resource acquisition that provided (and continues to provide) wealth for the ruling elite; enslaved and under/unpaid racialized/migrant labor that built and continues to uphold the infrastructure of the nation-state; and the discourses of Canadian identity centered on the perceived "nice and polite" Canadian and the peaceful multicultural mosaic of its vast land. Any effort to fully understand and address educational projects for change in Canada must engage with these three themes central to Canada's identity.

In the mid-1990s, the Molson Canadian beer company introduced their *I Am Canadian* campaign. In addition to the "I am Canadian" slogan, this long-standing campaign featured the "I am Canadian rant," a popular ad launched in 2000. Delivered by Average Joe Canadian (or "Joe Canada" as he was known), personified by Canadian actor Jeff Douglas, and U.S. director Kevin Donovan, the rant is approximately one minute in length. It begins with Average Joe Canadian stepping onto a concert stage, set against a background of screens displaying images of the waving maple leaf on the Canadian flag. A young white man seemingly in his late twenties or early thirties, Joe is wearing faded blue jeans, a grey T-shirt, and a flannel grey plaid button-down shirt over it. His work boots echo through the theater as he steps across the stage and approaches the microphone. His boyishly messy straight brown hair falls onto his brow toward his blue eyes (which we are made to notice through close-ups of his face). He begins his rant softly and tentatively over the microphone's gently screeching feedback, but quickly picks up tempo and volume as he ends the rant at a climax with the declaration: "I. Am. Canadian!" The text of the rant in full is as follows, and the performance can easily be found online:[1]

Hey, I'm not a lumberjack, or a fur trader....
I don't live in an igloo or eat blubber, or own a dogsled....
and I don't know Jimmy, Sally or Suzy from Canada,
although I'm certain they're really really nice.

I have a Prime Minister, not a president.
I speak English and French, not American.
And I pronounce it "about," not "a boot."

I can proudly sew my country's flag on my backpack.
I believe in peace keeping, not policing,
diversity, not assimilation,
and that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal.
A toque is a hat, a chesterfield is a couch,
and it is pronounced "zed" not "zee," "zed"!!!!

Canada is the second largest landmass!
The first nation of hockey!
and the best part of North America

My name is Joe!!
And I am Canadian!!! [2]

The "I Am Canadian" campaign was not only incredibly popular but won multiple national and international awards. It even infiltrated popular culture, with many parodies of the rant by prominent Canadian actors such as William Shatner (known in the Star Trek universe as Captain Kirk) and Simu Liu (best known for his role as Marvel superhero Shang-Chi). You would be hard-pressed to find a Canadian who has not seen or heard of Average Joe Canadian.

To say that this campaign both illuminates and ignites a dialogue and debate about Canadian identity and nationalism, and the role that corporations like Molson play in defining them, seems obvious enough.[3] As professor of communications Shuling Huang has pointed out, in a globalized world, nation-*branding* has been integrated with nation-*building*.[4] And by doing a lot of nation-branding work, popular culture has regularly played a key role in the global identity-development and -management of the nation-state. Beer campaigns have been a familiar part of national identity-building projects for a long time – not just Molson's "I Am Canadian" campaign. Budweiser's 9/11 tribute ad that aired just once during the 2011 Super Bowl is another well-known example. Whether discussing the branding *messages* themselves (that is, of Canadians as peacekeepers and hockey lovers), or the critiques and parodies responding to those messages, between the lines an entire recentering of an unspoken "average" Canada emerges. The average is a collection of points landing us in a middle that seems reasonably tempered, lukewarm,

and unoffensive, even while it is asserting itself. While this average Canada might have specific points of identity like *beavers*, *blubber*, and *boots*, these points gather to a nexus presented to be equally accessible to and deployable by all Canadians; this identity-building is what socioculturalists would call the *constructing* of average Canada (and an average Canadian).

The Average Joe Canada campaign is a widely circulated pop cultural text that functions as an overt public pedagogy about Canada and Canadians, a text that has inspired many others after it. It can be consumed at face value and loved or loathed. It is also a target for cultural critique for its themes of normalized white settler colonialism and patriarchal innocence.[5] But what is more relevant for the discussion here is not merely the *re/presentative* work done (or disrupted) by texts such as Average Joe and his rant, but their *re/productive* functions. These generative functions, which often lie beyond the text itself and live in an intertextual space, further the well-documented historical and present-day inequities in Canadian society and its institutions, including its schools. In other words, these texts keep a set of characters, vocabulary, and scripts about Canada alive and, by doing so, function as links holding the problematic inequities of Canada's past directly in hand with the problematic inequities today. To understand the inequities of mainstream Canada as illustrated by the Average Joe Canada example, especially those that influence education, I want to explore not simply the *nouns* of Canadian inequity (what we *are*), but the *verbs* (what we *do*). It is in the ongoing actions, the working, generating, producing, and reproducing, the average-*ing* of the national identity, that Canada's most stubborn equity-seeking habits are linked to and embedded in its history.

So how does the average-ing of Joe relate to the pursuit of educational equity in Canada? Like other nation-states established as settler colonies and built on stolen lands with under/unpaid or enslaved labor, issues of educational equity today are intimately connected to this past. Thus, to understand and address our ongoing challenges for greater equity, Canadian scholars studying equity in schooling in Canada have focused our attention on three core themes: first, the legacy of colonialism and resulting normalization of white Christian settler identity as "Canadian"; second, the erasure and criminalization of enslaved and under/unpaid racialized/migrant labor that built and continues to uphold the infrastructure of the nation-state; and third, the naturalized discourses of Canadian identity tied to the gentle Canadian and the peaceful multicultural mosaic of its vast land. One cannot fully understand nor address effective educational projects for change in Canada without engaging with these three themes centrally connected to Canada's national story.[6] They are not simply topics to be covered by the formal curriculum. They are a part of the stories we tell about Canada (that is, colonialism, migrant labor, and nice multiculturalism are the infrastructure of practices holding inequities in place), without which Canada's national identity would not exist. As such,

any proposed remedies to inequities are shaped by the policies, stories, and narratives that created those inequities.

I n his classic tome *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986*, historian John Milloy recounts the early period of the establishment of the nation-state in 1867, during which Victorian-era politicians began an active campaign to address the "Indian problem" in Canada.[7] These proud Canadians believed it was their moral duty to bring Christianity and civilization to the Indigenous communities of the lands they were settling. The task of civilization took patriotic fervor, as Milloy writes, "In the case of Father Lacombe, Oblate missionary to the Blackfoot, for example, the 'poor redman's [sic] redemption physically and morally' was 'the dream of my days and nights.'"[8] Assimilation of Indigenous peoples became Canada's official mission during the first term of Canada's first prime minister Sir John A. MacDonald. He informed parliament of the national goal "to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian [sic] people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion, as speedily as they are fit to change."[9] In the coming decades, these benevolent Christians, guided by their faith, power, and sense of moral authority, created and enforced a systematic project of assimilation and civilization that can accurately be described as genocide.

Operating in Upper and Lower Canada (prior to confederacy) and then throughout the country, residential schools were run by Anglican, Methodist, and Catholic missionaries.[10] There were day schools (industrial schools) and boarding schools. The earliest known residential schools opened in 1831, and the last was closed in 1996. Over 150,000 Indigenous children went through the residential school system, with mandatory attendance starting at age eight.[11] Children were often forcibly taken from their home communities, their hair cut, their clothes changed, given new Christian names, and forbidden to speak their home languages or observe their spiritual ceremonies and traditions. The formal curriculum at the schools was the bare minimum, focused mostly on reading and writing in English or French and on manual labor skills. By the 1930s, the goal of education was described simply as "Christian citizenship" achieved through "mingling with Canadians."[12]

The harsh punishments in residential schools combined with long periods of isolation from their families, recorded in historical accounts as well as in oral testimonies, have had an irreparable impact on Indigenous communities, and on Canada as a whole. Thousands of children died while in school and, with recordkeeping woefully inadequate, the extent of the crimes of the schools, the churches, and political leaders involved remains unknown but continues to be revealed. For example, unmarked graves are still being discovered through ground-penetrating LiDAR (light detection and ranging) technology used on the grounds

of former residential schools. As recently as January 2023, an estimated two thousand graves were discovered on the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School site on the Star Blanket Cree Nation in Saskatchewan.[13]Also in January 2023, 171 suspected graves were discovered by the Wauzhushk Onigum Nation at St. Mary's Indian Residential School in Ontario.[14] In February 2023, seventeen suspected graves were found, with dozens more suspected, at the Alberni Indian Residential School by the Tseshaht First Nation in British Columbia.[15] In April 2023, forty suspected graves were found by the Shíshálh Nation at the St. Augustine's Indian Residential School site in British Columbia, with more graves suspected.[16] In June 2023, Sucker Creek First Nation reported that eighty-eight suspected graves were discovered at St. Bruno's Indian Residential School in northern Alberta.[17]

Some living residential school survivors still recount the atrocities they experienced and witnessed. In the face of this profoundly sobering history, and in response to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was formed in 2008. The work of the commission, which concluded in 2015, was to document the full history of the era of residential schooling in Canada. In 2008, the prime minister, on behalf of the government of Canada, offered a formal apology for the residential school system. Resulting from the challenging political, cultural, geographical, and bureaucratic landscape within which the commission did its work, some outcomes had profound impacts on equity initiatives in schools across Canada. First among these impacts, the commission documented residential school survivor testimonies and established a database of publicly available resources hosted by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) at the University of Manitoba. The NCTR website features information (such as information about the National Advisory Committee on Residential Schools Missing Children and Unmarked Burials) for survivors and also community members who are directly living with the ongoing effects of the residential schools era.[18] The NCTR also hosts curricular resources and pedagogical support offerings, such as workshops for educators to teach about the era of residential schools in an informed way. While educators have access to the archives at any time, there is a call to focus on this work during the last week of September, marked by the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a federal statutory day on September 30, established in 2021.

Second among the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's major contributions to advancing equity in schooling is its Calls to Action, comprising ninety-four recommendations resulting from the commission's gathering of testimony and study.[19] The power of the calls is in their specificity and precision across a multitude of Canadian institutions (from schooling to health care to the criminal justice system).[20] They offer specific recommendations that many schools (across K–12 and higher education) have begun to act on. Calls 62–65 focus specifically on schooling, for example:

We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educator to :

Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.

Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.

Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.

Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

The Calls to Action have reverberated throughout the Canadian education landscape, although they are not without challenges. For example, in the context of teacher education, the challenges are not just about the difficulties of disseminating knowledge about colonialism, but also involve examining how teacher education programs (and universities in general) have been ideologically structured. As Aboriginal education scholar Lyn Daniels and colleagues explain :

For those working in the field of teacher education who have begun the complex process of (re)positioning themselves in relation to the Calls to Action issued in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015), it has become clear that they present much more than just an informational problem. . . . For the most part, the philosophies and knowledge systems that undergird [most mainstream teacher education programs operating in Canada] are not capable of providing meaningful guidance on how to respond to the challenges of Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. If teacher education programs in Canada continue to rely on existing dominant knowledge systems and governing structures to respond to the Calls to Action, they will fail to address them with the spirit and intent with which they were issued. There will be no cultural changes to teacher education programs unless they undergo significant structural changes that will allow Indigenous and Canadian people and peoples to walk alongside each other as equals. This idea of change also applies to universities more broadly.[21]

This need for a "culture change" points to the deeper, structural matters related to the "how we do" Canada and the work involved in addressing those depths. In other words, a simple knowledge transfer about colonialism is insufficient without also restricting the existing knowledge systems built by that very colonialism, which appear and act as neutral ways of knowing. Regardless of these challenges, deeper shifts identified by advocates and the Calls to Action serve as an important service to educators seeking to advance equity in schooling.

W hile the facts and historical details of the residential school era continue to be discovered, studied, and taught, the impacts on schooling and the legacies of this period persist in Canadian schools. Stories of the residential school era must continue to form a part of both the school curriculum and infrastructure critiques in Canada, but they are not the only stories about Canada's national identity in Canadian schooling today. In fact, aspects of these stories were central to the development of the residential school system and continue to influence Indigenous students as well as a wider network of racialized students of immigrant and settler ancestry. These stories include mythologies of *the benevolent helper* and *the civilizing work of schooling*.

Education scholars in Canada, as in other nations, have studied the "benevolent helper" story as it is manifested in school settings. Closely connected to the white savior character type in film and television – usually white women who selflessly work to save Indigenous, Black, and Peoples of Color (IBPOC) and youth from their culture, community, and the limiting life they are perceived as having – benevolent helpers enter the school environment as white savior teachers.[22] These hero-savior characters draw on the same moral duty and relentless pursuit of the saving mission as Sir John A. MacDonald and the government ministers and agents of earlier Christian civilizing missions. Their spunk and the clarity of their purposes are not dissimilar to that personified by Average Joe Canadian. There is certainty in this vision, an almost innocent likeability. This likeability and spunk can serve to sanitize the problematic ideological infrastructure that shapes and imposes the benevolent helper's desire to "help," to "make better," and to "civilize" those kids who are seen to be in need.

Most representations of these hero teachers (almost always white women) align with Canada's own national story of the benevolent hero. That is, Canada, much like the white savior teacher and Average Joe, is *really, really, nice*. Yet lesser known of Canada's history is its role in the transatlantic slave trade between the 1600s and 1833, when the Slavery Abolition Act was passed in the United Kingdom and by extension in its colonies.[23] While the historical facts about slavery in Canada can (with effort) be located, studied, and taught, the racist ideologies and sanctioned knowledge that helped justify it still circulate and impact the lives of Black youth in Canada.[24] Among these sanctioned racist knowledges was eugenics, which thrived in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The eugenics movement not only resulted in policies that ranged from forced sterilization to segregated schooling, but also served as the ideological framework for how intelligence is characterized, how schools measure and test it, as well as other foundational school practices (such as curricular tracking and ability assessment methods) built from the eugenics framework.[25]

The troubling history of eugenics in Canada and its ongoing effects were recognized in the work of the Canadian senate's Standing Committee on Human

Rights between 2019 and 2022. The executive summary of the committee's report reads, in part:

> Canada has a long history of forced and coerced sterilization. For much of the 20th century, laws and government policies explicitly sought to reduce births in First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, Black communities, and among people with intersecting vulnerabilities relating to poverty, race and disability. Though these explicit eugenic laws and policies have been repealed, the racist and discriminatory attitudes that gave rise to them are still present in Canadian society, and forced and coerced sterilization still occurs.[26]

Eugenics ideologies and their resultant practices – from forced sterilization to the determination of what constitutes intelligence and who has it – have tentacles reaching into the Canadian school landscape and equity initiatives to the present day. For example, the frameworks of what constitutes intelligence, and how educators name and assess it, shaped early assessments of intelligence and determinations of which forms of schooling are available to which groups.[27] Masquerading as neutral and scientific, standardized testing became all the rage in schooling across the spectrum.[28]

While much of the presumed neutrality of these practices have been well critiqued, the foundational ideas of inferior and superior intelligence continue to map onto racialized students. In a review of international research on special education and race, education scholars North Cooc and Elisheba W. Kiru report that disparities in special education representation resulting from historical inequities continue to impact Indigenous and racial minority students in Canada.[29] In Toronto, Canada's most racially diverse city, anecdotal evidence aligns with their findings. While the province of Ontario (which serves as the governmental authority for the province's school districts, including those in Toronto) does not collect race-based data on special education referral in particular, students of Aboriginal, Black, Latino, and Somali ancestry are more likely to drop out and are more likely to be placed in learning disability categories.[30]

What these trends reveal is that Canadian IBPOC students today still have to function in school against the sanitized deficit frameworks of eugenics applied to the assessments of their intelligence and abilities.[31] Further, through these patterns, they become the objects of "teacher benevolence." Teachers' savior behaviors might take the form of lower expectations for academic success and reduced referral to advanced placement and academic opportunities for IBPOC students. They may also emerge in the formal curriculum of Canada's history, either via omission of the role of racialized Canadians in the founding and building of the nation-state, or simply by highlighting the unfortunate evils (almost always of the past, now corrected) and creating otherwise tokenistic singular curricular representations of minoritized peoples and histories. The benevolent savior discourse

can also emerge in the elevation of either nonminoritized people as authorities on all subjects under study (including the experiences and histories of the minoritized) or people from minoritized groups who have gained access to the systems of power due to acclimation, choice, or other traits that "normalize" (and often also tokenize) them within slow- or no-shifting systems of power, and who are labeled as the one "good," unoffensive, and palatable representative among their group.

While no teacher would claim themselves as performing the role of the hero-savior on purpose, the behaviors of the "good white teacher" in the classroom are well theorized.[32] Examples include the prevalence of a deficit discourse about IBPOC students, the overreliance on "unfortunates" when tackling systemic societal oppressions in the nation's history, and the foregrounding of nonminoritized peoples and those fluent in the culture of power and authority as holding the necessary expertise and knowledge about the culture of authority to lead change.[33] These are all familiar issues in teacher preparation and wider learning environments at many K–12 and higher education spaces in Canadian schooling.[34] As education scholars Ardavan Eizadirad, Zuhra Abawi, and Andrew B. Campbell have pointed out, it is often white women administrators and school district leaders who determine the methods and contexts of antiracism education workshops and supports. Often, these in-vogue equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) events function as little more than a form of institutional image control.[35] As Eizadirad, Abawi, and Campbell put it, "diversity and equality work are about generating the right image and correcting the wrong one. Anti-racism in education is used as a framing device that allows for the racial order to remain intact by delinking anti-racism from its historical roots in anti-colonial, abolitionist, and anti-capitalist struggles."[36]

To engage with mainstreamed diversity and equity work in school settings, the politics and practices of image control and how the "right" image is corrected for within these institutional spaces (through actions we call "anti-racism education" or "diversity and equity work") must also be taken into account. Just as the institutional responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission can become tangled in the optics and image control of schools, universities, and governments working to "signal" their endorsement of and actions on the Calls to Action, the same pattern can occur in other educational endeavors (such as antiracism or EDI education) that lean on policy mandates or institutional need to demonstrate compliance, progress, or a progressive climate. While the path and policy pressure to walk it can be clear, the means to do so remain in the usual hands. In other words, we sustain the vocabulary, scripts, and language we have had to this point. As Daniels and colleagues state above, developing knowledge and fluency with *other* tools takes time and patience.

Connecting the dots, eugenic ideology was, at its peak, advanced by *progressive* voices in Canada. For example, Emily Murphy, the well-known white leader of the women's suffrage movement in Canada, was among the strongest advocates for

eugenics and believed that the highest calling of (white) women and motherhood was to protect fertility from "defective" stock.[37] Thus, as Canadians, we must confront the contradictions of policies and practices (like residential schooling and eugenics) that were seen by moral authority figures and progressives (teachers, government officials, clergy, and activists like Emily Murphy) as being, on the one hand, *well-meaning white protective goodness and moral authority wanting to bring about a better Canada and Canadian* and, on the other hand, revealed in time as being brought to life by *racist and discriminatory attitudes*. If we see that moral authority and goodness themselves are also culturally situated and not neutral, the work to draw on the best instincts among us to advance society and education for all must continually be problematized and leadership toward its goals must be shared.

Canada is known for, among other things, being the first modern state to adopt a national policy of multiculturalism (in 1971), which led to the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1985.[38] In many significant ways, the Act serves as a cornerstone of Canadian values, representing the nation-state's aspiration and commitment to an inclusive and diverse citizenry. In its preamble, the Act recognizes "the multicultural heritage of Canada" and "the rights of aboriginal peoples," names English and French as the official languages of the nation, recognizes the ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic diversity of Canadians, and affirms the government's commitments to human rights and preserving equal access and opportunity for all its citizens.

Critics of the Act often point to its failure to meet the well-documented and unaddressed challenges of the Act's commitments: for example, the reluctance to name colonialism, which is part and parcel of the two official languages of the nation. As sociolinguists Eve Haque and Donna Patrick explain, Canada has used language policies to both control national unity and manage racial difference through language hierarchies.[39] In many ways, the naming, centering, and codifying of English and French as the official languages of the nation-state further the elevation of those languages as superior to other "less civilized" Indigenous (and other) languages. This is, of course, closely aligned with the discourses that fueled the initial period of residential schooling and "civilizing" missions in the nation.[40] Thus, among the many aspects of Canada's Multiculturalism Act that remain less well known are its precursors, including the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963–1970), which gave rise to the Official Languages Act of 1969 and were followed by the policy of multiculturalism in 1971.[41] What this lineage reveals is that the management of, or a resolution to, the tensions between the two "founding" colonizing nations (England and France) needed to be resolved and constitutionally equalized and entrenched. Thus, it is not without merit to argue that it was French-Canadian recognition that drove the initial impetus to constitutionalizing biculturalism and bilingualism (and eventually, multiculturalism).

Indigenous and other linguistic, racial, and cultural minority groups have pushed back against these omissions. Yet while the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 resulted in the constitutional recognition of the founding French and English as well as Indigenous languages, it also further elevated and entrenched (only) French and English speaker rights by mandating they receive government services and education in their own languages, while giving no such recognition in federal law to Indigenous (nor other) language rights.[42]

While focused and funded language revitalization projects can and do exist, the elevation of colonial languages in the structuring of access to publicly funded resources such as education and knowledge impacts communities of immigrant settlers and newer Canadians as well. Canada's three largest immigration hubs (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver) receive most of the nation's immigrant new-comers, and those who are tracked into express entry as skilled labor under the Federal Skilled Worker program must demonstrate proficiency in either English or French.[43] This ensures that immigrants, especially those who are racialized (for example, of South Asian, African, and East Asian ancestries), are also put atop the hierarchy of their group.

In the 2021 census, of Canada's 36.3 million population, eight million – almost one-quarter – were immigrants, with 1.3 million immigrating since 2016, more than half of them admitted under an economic category (privileging those immigrants who can contribute to the economy through finances or skilled labor).[44] Unlike immigrants who are voluntary migrants, refugee claimants belong to persecuted and minoritized communities. While Canada is among the top immigrant-receiving nation-states (through its extremely selective language and economic criteria), the criteria for refugee claimants are defined under international law. In 2022, 140,621 individuals were granted asylum in Canada.[45] For scale, at the end of 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that there were 108.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide (43.3 million of them children), with nearly half of them from Syria, Ukraine, or Afghanistan. The top three refugee-receiving countries internationally are Türkiye (3.6 million), Iran (3.4 million), and Colombia (2.5 million) – nations not commonly included in lists of industrialized Western nation-states. In fact, 76 percent of the world's refugees (arguably the most vulnerable, equity-deserving peoples globally) are hosted in low- and middle-income countries.[46] While the 140,621 people who were accepted as refugees to Canada are no doubt thankful to have been accepted, its wealth alongside the public story Canada tells about its ideals demand that it do more to enact those ideals in the global community.

Despite these very real challenges, anchored in historical dynamics with far-reaching outcomes, Canada has made strides to improve representations of diversity and access as well as increase equitable outcomes for

students in Canadian schools. Teacher education in Canada has, in many respects, centered matters of social justice and problematized a diversity-without-inclusion framework; and it has made decolonization, racial equity, gender, and sexuality inclusion central to school success and core dispositions for students as future citizens in a pluralistic democracy.[47] Many teacher education programs across Canada have specific foci not just on subject matter topics (such as language arts or mathematics) but also on Indigenous education, antiracism education, sexual orientation and gender-identity education, and teacher education on less-examined matters of diversity, such as disableism.[48] There have been Afrocentric schools in Toronto for decades, centering experiences of Black students and Black histories in Canada.[49] While these programs are not without their critics and challenges, they are examples of hard-won shifts in public schooling.

In much the same way that Average Joe Canadian became image control for a nation that craves a point of distinction, identity, and belonging, antiracism work that is rooted in the anticolonial, abolitionist, and anticapitalist struggles that gave rise to it must disrupt (or at least name and mark) the narrative impulse of the nation-state to co-opt, absorb, define, and teach it. This tension continues to shape equity efforts in schools today. It is the ongoing advocacy of teachers, unions, and families that has helped nudge the needle on what we should and must expect from public schooling to foster a healthy pluralistic democracy in Canada.

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ENDNOTES

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6 It is important to note that these naturalized "kind and gentle Canada" discourses are
  not without fracture internally in Canada, especially when it comes to the history of
  "founding" French/English identity tensions. These tensions are ongoing and com-
  pounded by both newer racialized settler immigrant politics, as well as the internal,
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8 Ibid., 6.

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