

ICCJ Statement: Actions to Address Issues Related to Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, and Systemic Racism

Widespread protests in response to police violence aimed at Black, Indigenous, and racialized people in Canada have placed a renewed focus on the need for organizations to take concrete actions to address issues related to white supremacy, systemic racism, and settler colonialism. Faculty at the Institute of Criminology & Criminal Justice (ICCJ) take these calls to action seriously. As researchers we recognize that anti-Black and anti-Indigenous sentiments, practices, and policies are rooted in histories of slavery and colonization and pervasive logics of white supremacy within settler society. Addressing these deeply entrenched social forces and colonial apparatuses requires robust and principled engagement. Institutions in Canada have a tradition of producing comprehensive studies and detailed lists of recommendations to address issues of racial and colonial injustice, yet these recommendations often fail to be translated into actions. The contemporary public dialogue sparked by the Black Lives Matter movement and Indigenous organizers in Canada provides an opportunity to move beyond episodic discussions of structural racism and enact tangible actions, particularly in regards to criminal justice systems in Canada.

Over the past several months many open letters and calls to action have circulated, informed by academic research and knowledge produced from communities most impacted by racial injustice. Faculty at the ICCJ are signatories to a number of these letters, notably the statement *Addressing Systemic Racism at Carleton: Our Shared Responsibility*[1] and a letter signed by over 1250 scholars and lawyers calling to defund policing agencies.[2] As criminologists we are acutely aware of the limits of policing and prisons for addressing issues of harm and we are particularly critical of discourses that translate social problems into crime or policing problems. Contrary to criminogenic formulations, we understand policing as symptomatic of failures in other social systems; an expression of last resort that has, unfortunately, replaced other responses through its institutional expansion and moral enterprising. Despite the voluminous evidence that policing has negligible impacts on crime and is in fact often a source of harm [3], the institution has cultivated its image as the sacred guardians of social order.[4]

Colonial and racialized violence have long been a suppressed reality within Canadian policing, archiving important histories produced by official Commissions, coroner's reports, academic research, and community-grounded knowledge about state sanctioned injustice. What has been established through these research ventures is a vast knowledge about the culture of racism in criminal justice agencies in Canada. Notable reports include but are not limited to: the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP 1996), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC 2015), the Commission into the killing of Neil Stonechild (and the practice of Starlight Tours), the Ipperwash Commission (2007, into the killing of Dudley George), recent Ontario Human Rights Commission reports on practices of carding[5] and police violence against Black residents[6] and those with neurodivergence, as well as the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent. This is a short list of important resources, yet they all highlight one consistent and overarching finding: the violence marshalled by police is rooted in organizational culture, systemic racism, and colonialism. The 2017 UN Working Group report on Canada concludes that it is "deeply concerned by the structural racism that lies at the core of many Canadian institutions" and that "Canada's history of enslavement, racial segregation and marginalization of African Canadians has left a legacy of anti-Black racism." [7] In other words, issues of racial violence by police or other institutions are not merely a result of a few bad apples - but the result of rotten institutional structures and social formations rooted in racism and colonialism.

Thanks to the social movements, protests, vigils, and public education campaigns that have arisen in response to the most recent instances of police violence in North America,

conversations about the role of racism and settler colonialism in police and carceral institutions have mainstreamed. These conversations have presented an opportunity to reassess and reimagine the place of policing and criminal justice agencies in society as well as the opportunity to act in the name of social justice. Co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, Patrisse Cullors, citing Zora Neale Hurston, has commented that “there are years that ask questions and there are years that answer them” but there are also times when we can go on to do “both and all at once and consistently”. [8] Also calling our attention towards taking meaningful action, President of Carleton University Dr. Benoit-Antoine Bacon underlined in his elaboration on the recent racial violence, “we are part of the broader world and in no way immune from these issues and challenges” and that “much remains to be done” [9]. In the spirit of recent calls to question and to act, the ICCJ is the undertaking the following:

1. Student Bursaries

We have created four new \$1000 student bursaries. Funds will be available for the 2020-2021 academic year, and will be ongoing. Two of the bursaries are earmarked for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized students working in criminology. Two additional bursaries are earmarked for students who are engaged in social justice initiatives addressing racism and colonialism as they relate to criminology and the criminal justice system. The details of these bursaries are in development. The criteria for bursaries will be available at the beginning of the fall 2020 semester.

2. Anti-racism education and curriculum development

The ICCJ has developed multiple avenues to engage in collective education around issues of settler colonialism, anti-Black racism, white supremacy, and anti-oppression. Inspired by the words of Black, Indigenous and critical race scholars, we approach the challenge of confronting structural racism by acknowledging that it is not enough to voice displeasure about racism.

Over the course of the year, we will be hosting and attending a range of workshops that will be open to faculty, students, and staff. Student participation at workshops will be credited on their co-curricular records. Members of the ICCJ have recently met with Michael Charles, -- head of Carleton’s office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion--and are in talks with them about workshops and training. In addition, the newly appointed faculty committee on Anti-racism and Anti-colonialism Initiatives (see below) is committed to hiring BIPOC community members from the broader Ottawa community to work with faculty, staff and students to advance our knowledge and practices of anti-racism and anti-colonialism. We acknowledge that these are challenging topics that often involve as much unlearning as learning; a process of intellectual bricolage that strives to challenge and transform the epistemic environments that shape social hierarchies of race and white superiority complexes.

Criminology has been and still is a space of knowledge production in which racism and settler colonialism is alive and well. It also has a poor track record of representing its diversity of knowledge production, with dominant accounts of criminological practices overwhelmingly centred on the work of cis, heteronormative, able bodied, and affluent white men. As such, in addition to workshops and training, the ICCJ curriculum committee is taking steps to counter these dominant disciplinary histories and accounts by developing both anti-racist and anti-colonial curriculum resources with the goal of setting a standard for incorporating the voices, experiences, and research of Indigenous, Black, and other subalterned actors into all ICCJ courses. In collaboration with the Curriculum Committee we will be developing further initiatives to ensure that our classrooms will continue to be sites in which we are actively engaged in undoing the logics and effects of colonial, racist criminologies.

3. Faculty committee for anti-racism and anti-colonialism initiatives

A committee was struck to address institutional racism and settler colonialism within the ICCJ. The committee will undertake a survey to identify the needs of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour students within the program, and aims to take concrete action to address identified needs. The committee has been tasked with supporting the mentorship of Black, Indigenous, and racialized students. To this end will continue to financially support the work of the Afro Caribbean Mentorship Program (ACMP) (<https://carleton.ca/fass/the-afro-caribbean-mentorship-program-acmp/>), as well as other student run initiatives (on or off campus) aimed at addressing systemic racism and settler colonialism.

Moreover, we acknowledge that academic institutions have maintained a culture of oppression for racialized students. In response, we will strive to create an inclusive environment for Black, Indigenous and racialized students by developing an ongoing space to allow students to share their own experiences with racism on campus. The goal is to build a sense of community and eliminate feelings of isolation for those who have traditionally been marginalized in the academic environment.

4. Ending all placement positions with police and prison authorities

Beginning in the 2021-22 school year, we will be ending all student placement opportunities with policing and prison authorities. The field placement program has existed at Carleton since 1973 and has been administered by the ICCJ since the creation of the Institute 21-years ago. In the program, students spend 8-hours per week working at their respective agencies, providing valuable experience to criminology students while supporting partner organizations. Over this period of time, the ICCJ placement program has maintained positions with the RCMP, Correctional Services Canada (CSC), the Ottawa Police Service (OPS), and the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre (OCDC) - positions in which thousands of students have participated since the placements were initiated. Currently, the ICCJ maintains approximately 22 student placements with policing and corrections agencies in a given year: RCMP (11), CSC (9), OPS (1), and the OCDC (1). These positions represent a notable component of the program, which provides a total of around 80 placements.

Our decision to end these positions comes in response to growing calls for organizations to relinquish institutional and symbolic relationships with police and prison agencies. While transforming the practices of criminal justice institutions have been spotlighted as an essential component in addressing systemic racism and colonialism, these institutions have demonstrated their imperviousness to reform. Recent comments from RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki are illustrative -- her initial denial regarding the existence of systemic racism in Canadian policing, and then, after revising her position following public and political outcry, her inability to articulate a basic definition of systemic racism in what became an awkward and illustrative display of the practice itself.[10] Commissioner Lucki is not an outlier. RCMP Deputy Commissioner Curtis Zablocki echoed the same sentiments in early June when he told CBC: "I don't believe that racism is systemic through Canadian policing. I don't believe it's systemic through policing in Alberta." [11] Not only do these comments provide a window into how policing scholarship has long characterized police culture as isolated and hostile to outside critiques, they also illustrate that policing institutions in Canada do not have the leadership capacity to engage in the transformative change they may outwardly claim to embrace. Even in the context of widespread public scrutiny and claims to be reforming, Canadian police are on pace to kill a record number of people in 2020 [12], many of whom are racialized, Indigenous, and/or suffering mental health challenges.

Given these circumstances, maintaining our student placement positions with these organizations is untenable. While an argument may be put forward that students and new employees can make valuable contributions to changing workplace cultures in police organizations, this position is undermined by a vast literature on affirmative action, gender employment initiatives, and efforts at sensitivity training. In a survey of this scholarship,

Jean-Paul Brodeur remarks on the limits of internal reform on changing police culture by concluding: “people join the police much more because they want to belong to it than because they want to change it.”[13] Producing transformative change requires decentering the police and prisons in our collective efforts to reimagine how we govern harm, engage with social problems, and articulate our desires for a more just, a more humane, and a more egalitarian society.

Importantly, our disengagement with policing and carceral institutions is not about limiting our knowledge and study of policing or the carceral, nor are we limiting student experiential experiences with policing issues. In establishing a broader range of placement options, we aim to expand the scope of our engagement opportunities with research initiatives and community-based organizations working to respond to a broad spectrum of harms, including those associated with the criminal justice system and policing. By offering a more expansive range of field placement options, the ICCJ will continue to sustain a productive and engaged placement program that prepares students for diverse opportunities related to policing, criminal justice, and social welfare.

We do not take these decisions lightly, but with an acknowledgement that action must be taken. As an open letter from the University of Toronto’s Black Law Students’ Association put it: “The status quo is no longer acceptable. It was not acceptable in 1989 when Sophia Cook was shot by Toronto Police while sitting in the passenger seat of a car. It was not acceptable in 2016 when Ottawa Police brutally pepper sprayed and beat Abdirahman Abdi, a Black man with mental health issues, until he died. It is not acceptable today.”[14]

The ICCJ wants to underline our solidarity with the movements demanding fundamental transformations to criminal justice systems in Canada. Our steps outlined here are small first-steps that are building blocks that aim to contribute towards new possibilities surrounding criminal justice issues in Canada. As Robyn Maynard notes, “Black, Indigenous and racialized feminists have, for years, insisted that it is necessary to maintain the ability to look toward transformative racial justice beyond the necessary.” [15] Now is a moment to imagine and work towards new possibilities. We look forward to developing these initiatives and working collectively towards decolonialization and rigorous anti-racist practice.

[1]<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf-2VHBFVkvMHhKxnNjAzgnJz87I0QM7WnrweqlhUFq1cChYQ/viewform>

[2]https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd5ckUJxHnUlgsVS7NCJuP3EdvF--u15Z9uhNZMW0_wma5QDw/viewform

[3] Ontario Human Rights Commission, *A Disparate Impact: Second interim report on the inquiry into racial profiling and racial discrimination of Black persons by the Toronto Police Service*, 2020. Available online: http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/new-ohrc-report-confirms-black-people-disproportionately-arrested-charged-subjected-use-force

See also, the American Public Health Association (2018) statement and resource guide entitled, *Addressing Law Enforcement Violence as a Public Health Issue*. Available online: <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2019/01/29/law-enforcement-violence>

- [4] Peter Manning, *Police Work: The Social Organization of Policing*, 1997.
- [5] Ontario Human Rights Commission, *Under Suspicion: Research and consultation report on racial profiling*, 2017. Available online: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/under-suspicion-research-and-consultation-report-racial-profiling-ontario>
- [6] Ontario Human Rights Commission, *A Collective Impact: Interim report on the inquiry into racial profiling and racial discrimination of Black persons by the Toronto Police Service*, 2018. Available online: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/public-interest-inquiry-racial-profiling-and-discrimination-toronto-police-service/collective-impact-interim-report-inquiry-racial-profiling-and-racial-discrimination-black>
- [7] United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its mission to Canada; at Para 74, 75. Available online: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/239/60/PDF/G1723960.pdf?OpenElement>
- [8] Patrisse Khan-Cullors, *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*, 2018
- [9] Dr Benoit-Antoine Bacon, Our Shared Responsibility to Be Part of the Solution. Available online: <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/2020/our-shared-responsibility-to-be-part-of-the-solution/>
- [10] Global News, RCMP Commissioner Lucki passes on question about systemic racism in RCMP, June 26. Available online: <https://globalnews.ca/video/7111764/rcmp-commissioner-lucki-passes-on-question-about-systemic-racism-in-rcmp>
- [11] Carolyn Dunn, CBC News, Alberta RCMP deputy commissioner denies systemic racism in policing in Canada, June 9. Available online: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-rcmp-racism-policing-1.5605360>
- [12] Inayat Singh, CBC, Deadly Force series. Available online: <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/fatalpoliceencounters/>
- [13] JP Brodeur, *The Policing Web*, 2010, pg 149
- [14] An open letter from the Black Law Students' Association, June 2, 2020. Available online: <https://www.law.utoronto.ca/news/open-letter-black-law-students-association>
- [15] Robyn Maynard, *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present*, 2017.