



Anti-Black Racism Framework for the Planning Program

Purpose:

To communicate a commitment to confront anti-Black racism and racism more broadly in the planning profession, in planning education, and in our own Planning Program at the University of Toronto.

Context:

The Planning Program at the University of Toronto conducted a wide-ranging internal review during the 2020-2021 academic year, addressing issues related to curriculum, recruitment, and community relations. The review coincided with recent waves of police violence against Black and Indigenous peoples, and the historic political mobilizations by Black Lives Matter as well as Indigenous movements to protect their lands, waters and peoples. The present conjuncture of the Covid-19 pandemic further highlights the complex totality of systemic oppressions within which planners work, in academic, professional, and broader social contexts. More generally, official planning practices in Toronto transpire on colonized lands and contribute to well-documented processes of racialized spatial inequality. Under such circumstances, we wish to raise the question: how must planners respond to today's urgent, overlapping demands for justice?

Anti-Black racism defined:

In the current moment, we suggest, the answer to this question must involve contending with the ideologies and structures of anti-Black racism. Dr. Akua Benjamin (2003), emeritus professor, School of Social Work, Toronto Metropolitan University, introduced this term in the context of community-based struggles against the imagery and ideology of the Black/Jamaican criminal in Toronto media since the late 1960s; it refers to systemic racism perpetrated against Black Canadians and rooted in histories of slavery and colonization of people of Black-African descent in Canada. Anti-Black racism must be confronted as an ideology perpetuating hegemonic systems of whiteness and embedded within practices, policies, and procedures across a range of institutional settings including planning agencies, health care and universities.

The concept of anti-Black racism also encompasses an understanding that capitalist society depends on racism for its very existence and maintenance (Benjamin 2003: 79)—an insight that requires a critical exploration of the relationships among planning, racial capitalism and settler colonialism. In this regard, the concept of *racial capitalism* underscores the central roles slavery and colonialism have played in the development of capitalism at specific conjunctures. The “racial” in front of “capitalism” denotes these articulations, and how in turn racialized populations made “surplus” by capital have historically been enslaved, policed, dispossessed, surveilled and incarcerated (as well as how they have contributed to Black Marxism through theoretical innovation and revolutionary praxis, Haider 2021). Under these circumstances *racism* may be understood, in geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2002: 261) famous words, as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death in distinct yet densely interconnected political geographies.” As the work of cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1986) emphasizes, specific ideologies of anti-Black racism would thus be

required to justify the enslavement, exploitation and discriminatory treatment of Black people in specific times and places—including the dehumanization of the Black body to legitimize the brutality of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. We must therefore think in terms of, not one, but many, specific, interconnected racisms, and possible responses to them.

We recognize the imperative to consider how anti-Black racism intersects with other forms of racialized oppression, while also recognizing distinct experiences with inequality and injustice. In Canada, as scholars of colonial urbanism and Indigenous resurgence Heather Dorries, David Hugill and Julie Tomiak (2019) have demonstrated, settler colonialism is a key form of racial capitalism, which relies on the on-going dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities continue to be impacted by racist practices, policies and procedures rooted in settler colonialism across the territories that comprise what is today recognized as Canada. Meanwhile, we acknowledge that different forms of inequality and injustice—race, gender, class, sexuality, immigrant status, disability, (im)mobility—interact to compound experiences of racialized oppression (and here Kimberle Crenshaw’s (1990) theory of intersectionality proves indispensable).

Anti-Black Racism in Canadian Planning:

The Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) Code of Professional Conduct requires planners to “practice in a manner that respects the diversity, needs, values and aspirations of the public and encourages discussion on these matters.” However, a survey on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion conducted by CIP in 2021 reveals that the planning profession (still) lacks diversity in terms of race, Indigenous identity, disability and immigration status, when compared to the national demographics of Canada—despite the profession’s responsibility to plan for diverse communities. Professional planning bodies and planning agencies, as well as educational institutions, are implicated as institutions historically perpetuating systemic racism through segregation, displacement, inhospitable and exclusionary practices, urban renewal, gentrification, eugenics and medical research, erasure of Black spatial histories, and policies producing spatial inequities. Scholarship on these processes, and the relationship of the planning profession in Canada to colonialism and racial capitalism, is scarce and urgently needed.

Imperative for planning education to confront anti-Black racism:

Long standing and contemporary social movements responding to recent examples of anti-Black violence and the racialized Covid-19 impacts over the past two years have gone a long way toward galvanizing the planning profession to acknowledge how planning practices have contributed to racialized spatial inequality and injustice for Black and Indigenous peoples, historically and otherwise. We wish to contribute to these reparative processes by emphasizing that planning education faces a special imperative to confront systemic anti-Black racism (and interlocking forms of oppression), given its role in training professionals who must plan cities and regions in the public interest. In so doing, planning education also has a responsibility to create successful pathways in planning education for Black, Indigenous and other racialized students, and to recognize and account for alternative planning paradigms rooted in Black, Indigenous and other sources of knowledge.

The task must be one not only of highlighting Black identity and experience, but also—as Black planning scholar Rashad Williams (2020) has advocated—of de-privileging the centrality of whiteness in accounts of planning history and expertise, while identifying the role of planning in structures of racialized dispossession. For us, this injunction creates an opportunity to confront how anti-Black racism and racism more broadly manifests in our own curriculum, recruitment and community relations.

Commitments that guide our actions:

As a first course of action, we take inspiration from calls from abolitionist and anti-colonial planning for self-study—of our own Planning Program, its sources of knowledge, purpose and internal and external relations—as a key part of an anti-racist, anti-colonial praxis, and as a means of fostering a collective sense of humility and accountability (Abbot et al 2018, Daigle 2019, Dorries and Ruddick 2018, Latulippe 2015).

Building on, and as part of ongoing self-study, we commit to:

- [1] critically examining the relationships among planning, racial capitalism and settler colonialism;
- [2] challenging systemic racism, along with interlocking systems of social oppression;
- [3] querying the complicity of planning tools and methods in structures of racialized dispossession and the production of racial hierarchies as key dimensions of planning history;
- [4] highlighting Black self-determination in planning processes, as well as historical and current experiences of anti-Black racism;
- [5] deprivileging whiteness in planning history and expertise;
- [6] engaging the scholarship, practice and activism of Black, Indigenous and other specific marginalized and racialized groups to consider how core planning concepts and practices might be challenged and reformulated;
- [7] opening up the field by working to diversify faculty hires, actively recruiting a diverse student body, and creating space for external scholars, activists and practitioners to engage and inform planning processes and pedagogy;
- [8] developing mechanisms of support (including material ones) for Black, Indigenous and other racialized students, scholars and faculty;
- [9] ensuring a safe intellectual space for diverse thoughts and opinions;
- [10] collaborating with other academic planning programs, professional planning bodies and planning agencies in pursuing these commitments to confronting anti-Black racism.

In making these commitments, we adopt a broad understanding of planning, encompassing the social movements and community organizations as much as the official planning agencies that produce and shape space.

Actions taken:

The Department of Geography and Planning at the University of Toronto has made long-standing commitments to engaging planning as a terrain of social justice as indicated in the Mission Statement of the Planning Program. The Planning Program is situated within a wider department that, through its administrative leadership and its Committee on Equity and Diversity, has strived over the long term to promote critical analysis of our shared and distinctive legacies, while also revitalizing our fields and shaping our practices in accordance with the values of anti-racism, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, equity, diversity and justice.

We consider this statement as a live, working document that will over time take stock of specific actions and initiatives in the Planning Program and Department of Geography and Planning. Specific actions taken during and following the 2020-2021 internal Planning Program include:

- developed a range of tools and metrics with which to self-audit our program on an ongoing basis in relation to the values of anti-racism and justice;
- launched a new course on *Communications in the Face of Power* (PLA 1108) emphasizing anti-oppression and decolonial praxis;
- as a wider Department working with and supporting faculty through curricular governance processes, introduced graduate courses on Black Geographies of the Atlantic, Anti-Colonial Planning, Geographies of Decolonization and Liberation, Place and Indigenous Research, and Disability and the City;
- included in the graduate Planning core and concentration gateway courses, materials explicitly addressing racism in planning and/or featuring planning action oriented to transforming oppressive structures including racial capitalism;
- as a wider Department engaged in consultation with colleagues from within the UofT Black Research Network and Indigenous Research Network, instituted Black Graduate Scholar Awards in Geography and Planning; Indigenous Graduate Scholars Admissions Awards; Geography and Planning Awards for Black, Indigenous and International Students; and a QTBIPOC and International Student Mentoring Program, oriented to attracting and supporting a diverse and critical student body;
- encompassed mechanisms for student participation and leadership in the program review process, including paid advisory roles, membership on the review committee, and town halls for community feedback;
- contributed the service of the Planning Program Director to the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) Anti-Black Racism Task Force in Planning, which generated a series of recommendations to OPPI council pertaining to transforming planning education, supporting Black planners, cultivating relationships with diverse Black organizations, and generating equity-focused data, policy and evaluation.

We welcome feedback on this anti-Black racism framework, and commit to considering and collating feedback for subsequent revisions down the road. Please email feedback to Planning Program Administrator Marija Wright, at wright@geog.utoronto.ca.

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