

# CANADIAN HISTORY: HOW ACCURATE IS IT?

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Canada has often been portrayed as a liberal, accepting, and multicultural society. Although that may be the case, racism does exist in this country. *Speak it! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia* is a documentary that highlights how Afro-Canadians in Nova Scotia feel undervalued in terms of their history not being taught in Canadian schools. The narrator of the documentary – Shingai Nyajeka, a then sixteen-year-old boy – detailed how lost at sea Black Nova Scotians felt about their history not being taught in schools. In this review I shall critique the essence of the film, as well as summarizing key points from the documentary – such as anti-Black racism and solutions offered to reduce racial injustice.

A notable aspect of the film was the overwhelming resentment many of the Black Nova Scotians had towards White Canadians. It seemed to them that Black people were forgotten in Canadian history – and were more of a burden to Canadian society. As mentioned by the narrator “It is a lot harder to find something about us” (5:14-5:18). Due to the

sensitive nature of the majority of Afro-Canadian history – such as slavery and racism – such information is either concealed or simply not mentioned. The consequence of this creates an inaccurate reality of Canadian history, and thus presumes a better reputation for Canada. The essence of history is to learn from the past, to not make the same mistakes in the future.

Towards the end of the documentary there is a debate towards the reaction of *Jungle Fever* – a film about an interracial relationship. A middle-aged Black woman’s stance on the film was that there are serious complications in regard to such a relationship, and she preferred to only be with someone of the same race. Shingai challenged her view and argued that there are a lot of mixed-race people in the audience, and that love has no colour (20:51-21:51).

Another notable aspect of the documentary was that most of the issues shared in the documentary still exist today, such as institutionalized racism and overt racism. In

the documentary, the narrator mentions the annual march against racism, which draws parallels with today's *Black Lives Matter* Movement. It would seem that, as time passes, racism would become less frequent as before, but in actual fact, one could argue it has become worse. It is important to note that racism is a mentality issue; the more people change their attitudes towards race, for the better, and the less racism exists in society.

A notable misconception that could be taken from this documentary is that Black people are playing the victim – where all the problems that occur in society are perceived to be to the detriment of Black people. Unfortunately, due to the consequences of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, many Black people who are descendants of slaves from the Americas are often lost on the cultural identity of their ancestral motherland. The narrator highlights this issue when he visits Zimbabwe at aged twelve, as he was star-struck by a society solely governed by Black people. By default, he previously regarded Black people at the bottom of the societal ladder, who were not involved at all in making governmental decisions. This visit ultimately questioned Shingai on whether institutionalized racism exists in Canadian society. For a race that has settled in Canada for hundreds of years – opportunities are perhaps few and far between.

Therefore, these reasons above prove the seriousness of racism in society. Often misled as a problem between only Whites and Blacks,

racism is a mentality issue that has been institutionalized in Western societies for hundreds of years. This documentary highlights this issue and provides possible solutions to improve the way society implicitly and explicitly deals with race issues and racism. Many of the issues of the documentary resonate today, such as marches against racial discrimination. This documentary is ultimately an essential measure of whether progress has been made today, or whether society has regressed. In English professional football, for instance, players take a knee before a match starts to highlight that racial discrimination will not be tolerated in sport and, most importantly, society. These actions have been supported by sections of the press, as well as being criticised as progressively reducing the meaning of its significance. It is important to realise that, in order to eradicate racism, there must be an emphasis on altering mental attitudes towards race. This can be administered in education – in creating a discrimination-free environment as much as possible.

Furthermore, in aspects such as social media, there must be serious punishments towards those who use hate speech on those platforms, such as being banned from said platform, or even jail time. Although these seem very extreme and harsh, in order for society to progress, these sorts of solutions must be implemented.

REFERENCES

Hamilton, S. (1993). *Speak It! from the Heart of Black Nova Scotia*