University of Windsor

BLACK ALUMNI INITIATIVE

Phase 1: Consultations Report



Prepared by

The Office of the Vice-President, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion

Initiatives Against Anti-Black Racism

Fall 2021

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Office of the Vice-President Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

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We acknowledge that this report, and the work we continue to do today, is only possible because of the generations of Black students, staff, and faculty who are here now and who have come before us. We thank you for sharing your breadth of knowledge, ideas, and expertise with us. Your voices are the foundation for confronting, challenging, and eliminating anti-Black racism at the University of Windsor for the purpose of creating an equitable and sustainable next chapter.

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OVERVIEW

The Black Alumni Initiative commenced as a grassroots effort in September 2020 when the Initiatives Against Anti-Black Racism Strategic Planning Officer, Marium Tolson-Murtty, met with Black alumni in an informal capacity as a form of outreach. In the Summer of 2021, the inaugural Office of the Vice-President, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (OVPEDI) made this initiative a priority as part of the University's broader Anti-Black Racism Strategic Planning Framework. This initiative encompasses a 3-phase approach:

- 1. Black Alumni Roundtable Consultations
- 2. Black Alumni Strategic Planning Summit
- 3. Black Alumni Engagement Strategic Action Plan

Phase I took place from June to September 2021. The OVPEDI engaged in a series of consultations with Black alumni to help the University establish, and in many cases, rebuild its relationship with Black alumni. These consultations started as a small informal roundtable with a handful of Black alumni but gradually evolved into a series of consultations that spanned three months and six decades of graduation classes.

Generations of Black students, staff, and faculty have been impacted by the University's harmful and systemic anti-Black policies, practices, and procedures. These systems of harm have allowed Black community members to suffer and endure the indignities of racism in efforts to work, teach, earn a degree, and just simply be. These experiences can never be mitigated to a mere moment in time; each individual experience reveals a pattern that, throughout the decades, Black students, staff, and faculty have consistently been othered and treated as inferior. Consequently, this institution has never fully realized or recognized the pride, excellence, and success of Black students, staff, and faculty.

This report reflects the culmination of stories and perspectives of Black alumni concerning what (re)engagement with the University can look like for everyone involved.

TIMELINE

Pre-Consultation Phase (September 2020): The Anti-Black Racism Strategic Planning Officer begins informally meeting virtually with Black alumni as a grassroots effort to gauge perspectives on Black alumni (re-)engagement.

Consultation Phase (June – September 2021): Formal consultations begin with Black alumni. Outreach is initially based on self-identified individuals from the Black Alumni Survey (as of April 2021) before evolving into a collaborative effort between the Initiatives Against Anti-Black Racism Team, the Alumni Office, and Public Affairs & Communications. A Black Alumni Facebook page was started by alum, Alain P. Arthur, as a result of the initial June consultation and has since grown to over 150 alumni within a month.

- June 19, 28 ,29 ,30
- August 23, 24, 26
- September 1, 2

Touchpoints (June – August 2021): The Initiatives Against Anti-Black Racism Team met with the Alumni Office and Advancement Team to engage their efforts and identify potential areas of collaboration.

- June 30: Meeting with Patti Lauzon, Director of Alumni and Donor Communications.
- August 10: Presentation of preliminary findings from the on-going Consultation Phase to the Alumni Office and the Advancement Team.

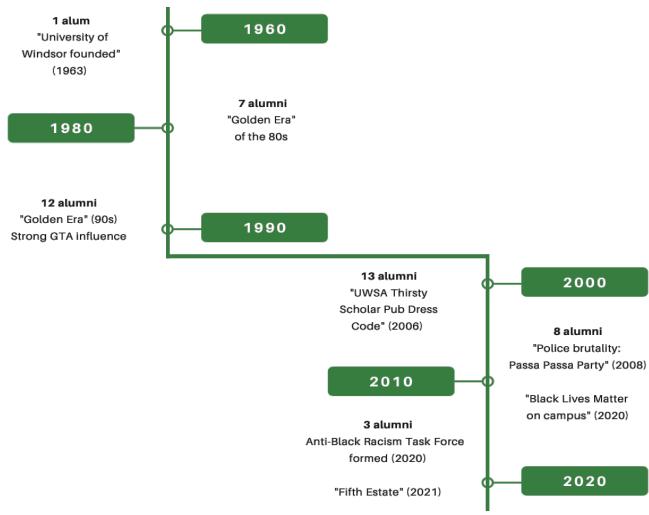
SETTING THE CONTEXT: WHO IS IN THE ROOM?

Statistics Overview

Total Sessions	9
Total Participants	56
Self-identified Gender	Female (16), Male (14)
Graduation Year Range	1964 – 2021

Graduation Year Timeline

The timeline below shows the range in graduation years of the participants and key events throughout those years. For more information, refer to the Narratives section.



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Degrees:

- Education
- JD/Law
- Sciences (General, Biology, Chemistry [M.sC])
- Social Sciences (Sociology, Psychology, Political Science, Communications)
- Social Work (BA & MSW)

Other Institutions Attended:

Howard University in the United States, University of Toronto, Wayne State University in the US, Western University, Queen's University

Careers

- Crown Prosecutor
- Government
- Politics
- Law Enforcement
- Police
- Community Advocates
- Dean

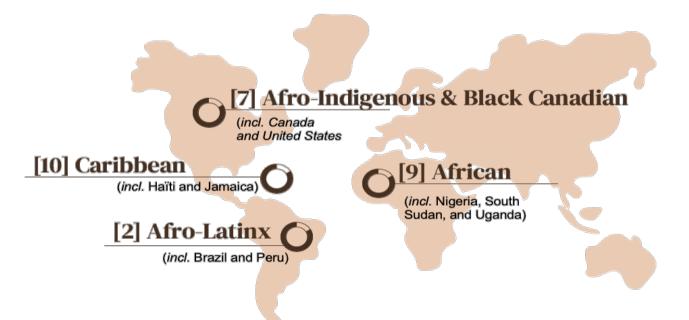
- Professor
- Elementary and High School Teachers
- Historian
- Professional Athletes
- Coaches
- Entrepreneurs

Hometowns/Regions

Windsor, Detroit, United States, Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Québec

Ethno-Cultural Origins

World map of countries represented:



METHODOLOGY: THE PROCESS

Participants were identified from an initial Black Alumni Survey conducted informally by Marium Tolson-Murtty, the Initiatives Against Anti-Black Racism Strategic Planning Officer as well as from a Black Alumni Roundtable Survey that was circulated as part of a collective outreach effort. The Alumni Association distributed the survey to its network via Alumni E-News and social media. Public Affairs & Communications circulated to the campus and broader community via the University's social media channels, a media release, and the Daily News. Word of mouth and sharing direct information on the grassrootsled Black Alumni Facebook group further inspired interest in participation.

Consultations were conducted in a virtual meeting space on Microsoft Teams with approx. 3-15 participants per session. At the beginning of every session, we reminded participants that we are not inviting or relying on the retelling of traumatic experiences to guide discussion, for the very reality of that trauma is telling in and of itself. However, using the prompt questions below, we were intentional in facilitating a space that produced meaningful next steps which the University can act on to (re)engage our Black alumni.

Participants were asked the following prompts:

- 1. What is your current level of engagement with UWindsor and Why?
- 2. Does your undergrad/grad experience play a factor into your level of engagement?
- 3. How has UWindsor failed Black students?
- 4. Where has UWindsor failed you as a Black alum?
- 5. What does the institution have to do to re-engage you? Other Black alumni?
- 6. As Black alumni, what should we be focusing on in order to help future Black students at UWindsor?

NARRATIVES: BLACK ALUMNI EXPERIENCES

The following represents the general responses from participants, which curate the narratives of their experiences. Please refer to Appendix A: Definitions for key terms.

Q1. Level of Engagement

- Alumni noted that they are disconnected from the institution (approx. 80% disconnected and 20% connected).
- When alumni were engaged, it seemed to be for the sole purpose of fundraising.

From Black alumni:

"UWindsor is near and dear to my heart because you were my first

[university]. But we have no connection."

Q2. Undergraduate/Graduate Experiences

- All participants related to their student experience as a contributor to their current level of engagement.
- Alumni generally experienced anti-Blackness during their student experience, especially within the classroom by both peers and professors, that was perceivably condoned or caused by the institution.
- Some alumni noted the feeling of isolation being the lone Black person in their program.
- Alumni noted that there was no selection of courses around Black history. This absence meant a tremendous loss of wealth and knowledge for both students and the institution, particularly due to the rich historical importance of Windsor to the Underground Railroad.
- Black international students from continental Africa or the Caribbean may have been less likely to vocalize their dissent to racism, microaggressions, and mistreatment for fear of retaliation against their student visas. Consequently, it was understood that, for their own wellbeing, international students may not have engaged in public activism to the same extent as domestic students.
- Several alumni expressed having positive experiences during their time at the University. Notably, such positive experiences were attributed to

campus involvement through student group and leadership opportunities (e.g. UWSA, CJAM, Black student groups), and, most importantly, the strong presence of a Black student community hailing from Toronto, Windsor-Essex, continental Africa, and abroad. Some alumni acknowledged that their involvement was not because of pride they felt for UWindsor but to work towards a better campus experience for future generations of Black students.

• There was a perception of the 80s and 90s as being the "golden era" due to the strong sense of pride, interconnectedness, and community felt among Black students, staff, and faculty. One alum noted that the University felt to them like the "Howard" or "Morehouse" or "Spelman" (Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the US) of Canada.

Q3. UWindsor's Failure of Black Students

- Some alumni referred to their own experiences.
- There is a lack of Black representation among faculty and staff. Alumni rarely if ever saw themselves reflected in their educators, curriculum, or campus services (ex. academic support and financial aid).
- Alumni cited current events and events since graduation in relation to the impact of institutional trauma. Crises du jour to university administration (ex. Thirsty Scholar Dress Code 2006, Passa Passa 2008, Fifth Estate 2021) are lifelong, traumatic crises for Black students. They are a reminder that nothing has changed, as well as feed into a poor reputation of the University for prospective students. The general sentiment is that the University does not show up for its Black students.
- Parents noted that because their experiences were so positive back in the day, they highly encouraged their children to attend the University of Windsor. Despite encouragement, however, their children decided to attend elsewhere because of today's image of the University.
- Black international students have been systemically misused and mistreated by the University as "cash cows." The University romanticizes the institution as a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for international students, but walks away from providing them any supports after they graduate.

From Black alumni:

"[How the University treats its international students] is the height of injustice; injustice against one is an injustice against all."

- There is no support for Black student athletes once recruited. There is no integration or engagement with Black student groups, programming, or community.
- There is a lack of awareness of services (ex. counselling) on campus, not because of ignorance but as an outcome of the inherent disconnectedness of some Black students from the University. One will not willingly explore the halls of a place at which they do not feel they belong.
- It was poignant that the burden of addressing Anti-Black Racism relied upon the strenuous activism of Black students. Black students should not be responsible for advocating for their own safety at an institution that is legally mandated to facilitate a safe and inclusive environment for every student. Anti-Black racism is not a "Black" issue; it is a deeply ingrained institutional problem that must be vigorously combatted and dismantled by the institution.

From Black alumni:

"It felt like we were protesting all the time instead of being at university."

Q4. UWindsor's Failure of Black Alumni

- There is a lack of representation of Black alumni among and within the University Board of Governors, the Alumni Association Board of Directors, the Alumni Office, and University-led initiatives (ex. the Alumni Magazine).
- When looking at the failures of the University's engagement with Black alumni made comparisons with Wayne State University. It was noted that Wayne State does a significantly better job at keeping connected to its Black alumni. For UWindsor graduates who also attended Wayne State, they were more inclined to reinvest their knowledge and wealth across the border than here at home.

Q5. Re-Engagement with Black Alumni

- The starting point to re-engage Black alumni requires the institution to first acknowledge the exclusion and overall disservice that is deeply embedded in anti-Black racism. Due to a longstanding period of silence from the University without any proactive outreach to Black alumni, re-engagement will require sustained reconciliation efforts to mend the relationship. Despite the institutional disappointment, betrayal, and trauma suffered by Black alumni, the interest to engage with their Alma mater is present.
- All alumni noted that receiving consistent email communications and updates about the Alumni Association would be highly appreciated. Instead of the alumni having to search up what is happening at the University of Windsor they want their own Alma mater to communicate with them. It was noted that by reengaging, Black alumni are risking putting themselves at harm again, so the commitment to reconciliation must be genuine and facilitate a safer climate for current and past Black students.
- Black alumni expressed that they would feel more confident about investing their dollars into the University if they knew those dollars supported Black groups, initiatives, events, and overall Black programming on campus.

Q6. Focus on Future Black Students

- Alumni want to engage with current Black students but need to be made aware of the supports necessary for them. There was a strong desire for a mentorship linkage/network as a form of intergenerational support.
- There is no gateway to tap into UWindsor talent, particularly Black talent, to extend job opportunities. This is a missed opportunity for both UWindsor, with respect to making meaningful partnerships with community organizations, and current Black students, who do not have access to university services or resources that could facilitate this gateway.
- Black scholarships and initiatives never have long-term institutional sustainability. As a result, the University is seen as dangling short-term solutions to appease the Black community.

THEMES

Throughout the Black alumni consultations, several themes emerged from the narratives shared by Black alumni participants, which were categorized into three topics:

- 1. Black Student Experience
- 2. Institutional Support
- 3. Alumni Reinvestment, Opportunities & Mentorship

1. BLACK STUDENT EXPERIENCE

As a post-secondary institution, the pre-eminent reason students attend the University of Windsor is for academic purposes. An overwhelming number of participants revealed how this exact forefront has underserved and underrepresented the Black community while underperforming at the executive and administrative level.

From Black alumni:

"Black representation among faculty and staff needs to be promoted at the University of Windsor."

The quality of education and the overall student experience is insufficient in incorporating Black perspectives, spaces, and particularly representation both in terms of who is teaching as well as what is taught. As Political Scientist Dr. Malinda Smith, the current Vice President of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at the University of Calgary, cites statistical evidence about the grave underrepresented, "in Canada, Black scholars account for only 2% in academia."¹ The deeply entrenched anti-Black systemic racism, notes Smith, create barriers that start as early as Junior Kindergarten and elementary. This concerning deficiency substantiates the institution urgency to to hire more Black professors and staff.

From Black alumni:

"create, fund, staff, and sustain a Black Studies degree program."

To do better for future Black students, the University must gain a comprehensive awareness of the satisfaction levels and experiences of Black students in the present, particularly over the course of their degree program. It is recommended that the OVPEDI takes the lead on this institutional initiative.

From Black alumni:

"the University can launch a Black Student Satisfaction Survey to collect information on how students are experiencing the University, both at the faculty-specific and institutional-wide levels including academics, inclusion, accessibility to and quality of services."

2. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Ensuring that all students from First Year all the way to graduate studies are aware of the services available to them through the OVPEDI. During their own time at the University, Black Alumni recounted how they either were not aware or not made accessible to like-minded offices. In order to ensure the success of the OVPEDI it is essential that the institution takes a committed stance and mandates the initiatives from the office on an institution-wide scale.

From Black alumni:

"the University ensures institutional support, visibility, and promotion of the Office of the Vice-President, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion.

3. ALUMNI REINVESTMENT, OPPORTUNITIES & MENTORSHIP

From Black alumni:

"advocate for formal endorsement, logistical support, and funding for a Black Alumni Association Network operated and led by Black alumni."

Participants voiced a need for a Black alumni association/network to provide mentorship, support, and job opportunities to Black UWindsor students. There is power in numbers and networking, and Black alumni can communicate opportunities down the pipeline to the Black student community at the University. If there was a network, issues that matter to the Black community can be championed and the University can be held accountable for its commitments to the Black community.

From Black alumni:

"the Alumni Association begin the collection of racial demographic data on Black alumni."

APPENDIX A: TIMELINE SUMMARIES

"The Golden Era " (2006) (80s and 90s)

The Black alumni reminisced of the late 80s and early 90s period as one where they felt proud to be University of Windsor students. The interconnected Black community from Windsor, with high influx of students from Detroit and the Greater Toronto Area established a particularly robust student life that accredited the University of Windsor as the 'Howard University of Canada'. To contextualize, Howard University a historically Black college in the United States. For more information or more info on the significance of HBCUs, see here.²

"UWSA Thirsty Scholar Pub Dress Code" (2006)

The University of Windsor Students' Alliance has revoked a controversial dress code that drew accusations of racism on campus. The UWSA agreed Thursday to end a policy at the Thirsty Scholar Pub that denies entry to people wearing hip-hop style clothing such as baggy jeans, doo rags, bandannas, chains, men's tank tops and crooked ball caps. The motion to revoke – passed unanimously – included cognition "of all groups and parties that were discriminated against."³

"Police brutality: Passa Passa Party" (2008)

Passa Passa Beatings/Arrests of Black UWindsor Students: Consider the events surrounding the 2008 Passa Passa party at the UWindsor's campus pub, where

25 armed police and SWAT officers with police dogs in tow beat down and violently arrested Black students on campus without cause; this along with the continuous mis-labelling of Jordan Afolabi as "aggressive" and "dangerous" by UWindsor admin are only two examples that illustrate the pervasive pattern of over-policing, surveilling, and blaming of Black students for Windsor police interventions and brutality. The UWindsor admin shows no consideration for the triggering and anxiety-inducing environment their behaviours create for any Black student that may attempt to challenge the discrimination—even when the Black student does so by following all protocol and protesting peacefully.⁴

"Black Lives Matter on campus" (2020)

Ensuing the wake of racial injustice across Canada and all around the world compounded with violent police brutality of Black and racialized people, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement⁵ witnessed a particular peak in the Summer of 2020. On campus, this was manifested through student activism to call out racism, specifically with incidents of professors using the n-word in classes. Originally founded by three Black women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, the Black Lives Matter movement commenced as a hashtag in 2013. Since then, the BLM movement has evolved into a full-fledged national and global movement with more than 40 chapters.

Anti-Black Racism Task Force formed (2020)

In the Fall of 2020 as the University of Windsor's commitment to challenge, confront, and eliminate anti-Black racism, the President's office established the Anti-Black Racism Task Force (ABRTF)⁶ with a twofold agenda: to address

the issues in systemic racism and create a sustainable action plan through its recommendations. Marium Tolson-Murtty was seconded as the Anti-Black Racism Strategic Planning Officer and led the ABRTF. The composition of the ABRTF included faculty, staff, and students with a total of 20 members, whereby two members served as co-chairs. As Tolson-Murtty epitomized the cruciality of an anti-Black racism task force, "In the end it's not a Black and white issue, it's a humanitarian issue," she said. "It affects all of us and our everyday well-being and how we live our lives. Everyone wants to play a role in dismantling anti-Black racism."⁷

"Fifth Estate" (2021)

A law student at the University of Windsor says he has come face-to-face with what it means to be Black on campus in Canada, and the reality of what that means scares him. "I started seeing in real time what anti-Black racism can do, [...] It can be the difference between me being a lawyer and me being a criminal." Students, staff, and faculty at some of Canada's largest universities say they have experienced anti-Black racism on campus, and that they were targeted if they spoke out about their treatment, reported the findings of an investigation by **The Fifth Estate**. In February 2019, the student was running late for class and ended up in an altercation with a white student on campus. When he opened a door, it struck another student who was trying to enter at the same time. "The student approached me aggressively asking why I hit him with the door," said the student, and a fight ensued. "At that point, I defended myself ... I just kept trying to tell him, like, walk away, stop."⁸

APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS

<u>African Diaspora</u>	Black Canadians, or African Canadians, are people of African or Caribbean ancestry who live in Canada. ⁹ Diasporas can be defined as "national migrant communities living in interaction among themselves and with their country of origin. ¹⁰ A majority of people, who used to fall under the same category of 'Black', searches for a term which identifies them as people who are part of a culture and not one that necessarily reflects their race and skin color. ¹¹
<u>Afro-Indigenous</u>	A term that refers to peoples who have both Indigenous and African lineage. ¹²
<u>Afro-Latinx</u>	The term Afro-Latinx (or Afro-Latino, -Latina, or - Latine) refers to individuals of Latin America or of Latin American descent who are also of African ancestry. The term Afro-Latinx brings visibility to Latinos who are Black, as descendants of the African diaspora. Many people believe that the two identities are mutually exclusive, when in reality Latinx is an ethnic identity while Black is a racial identity. This term more accurately captures this identity by embracing both simultaneously. The individuals who fall under this identity are as diverse as Latin America itself, represented by a wide variety of cultures, skin tones, hair textures, and traditions. ¹³

<u>Anti-Black Racism</u>	Policies and practices rooted in Canadian institutions such as, education, health care, and justice that mirror and reinforce beliefs, attitudes, prejudice, stereotyping and/or discrimination towards people of Black-African descent.
	The term 'Anti-Black Racism' was first expressed by Dr. Akua Benjamin, a Ryerson Social Work Professor. It seeks to highlight the unique nature of systemic racism on Black-Canadians and the history as well as experiences of slavery and colonization of people of Black-African descent in Canada. ¹⁴
<u>Black</u>	Black people are a racialized classification of people, usually a political and skin colour based category for specific populations with a mid to dark brown complexion. Not all people considered "Black" have dark skin; in certain countries, often in socially based systems of racial classification in the Western world, the term "Black" is used to describe persons who are perceived as dark- skinned compared to other populations. ¹⁵
<u>Black Canadian</u>	Read <u>Why we capitalize 'Black' (and not white)</u> Black Canadians, or African Canadians, are people of African or Caribbean ancestry who live in Canada. Diasporas can be defined as "national migrant communities living in interaction among themselves and with their country of origin" ¹¹ . The notion of diaspora must be distinguished with other phenomenon of migration, as the importance of the ties between members of the Diasporas and their country of origin is prevalent."

<u>Institutional</u> <u>Courage</u>	An institution's commitment to seek the truth and engage in moral action, despite unpleasantness, risk, and short-term cost. It is a pledge to protect and care for those who depend on the institution. It is a compass oriented to the common good of individuals, the institution, and the world. It is a force that transforms institutions into more accountable, equitable, healthy places for everyone. ¹⁶
<u>Institutional</u> <u>Trauma</u>	Institutional trauma, also referred to as institutional betrayal, is the institutional action and inaction that can worsen the impact of traumatic experience. ¹⁷ Wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings by individuals (e.g. sexual assault) committed within the context of the institution. ¹⁸
<u>Racial Profiling</u>	Any action undertaken for reasons of safety, security or public protection that relies on assumptions about race, colour, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, or place of origin rather than on reasonable suspicion, to single out an individual for greater scrutiny or differential treatment. Profiling can occur because of a combination of the above factors, and age and/or gender can influence the experience of profiling. In contrast to criminal profiling, racial profiling is based on stereotypical assumptions because of one's race, colour, ethnicity, etc rather than relying on actual behaviour or on information about suspected activity by someone who meets the description of a specific individual. ¹⁹

<u>Racialization</u>	The process through which groups come to be socially constructed as races, based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, language, economics, religion, culture, politics, etc. ²⁰
<u>Racism</u>	Racism is a belief that one group is superior to others performed through any individual action, or institutional practice which treats people differently because of their colour or ethnicity. This distinction is often used to justify discrimination. There are three types of racism: Institutional, Systemic, and Individual. ²¹
<u>Settler/Settler</u> <u>Colonialism</u>	Within the context of race relations, the term refers to the non-indigenous population of a country. Settler colonialism functions through the replacement of indigenous populations with an invasive settler society that, over time, develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty. In Canada and in other countries, the ascendancy of settler culture has resulted in the demotion and displacement of indigenous communities, resulting in benefits that are unearned. ²²
<u>Social Justice</u>	A concept premised upon the belief that each individual and group within society is to be given equal opportunity, fairness, civil liberties, and participation in the social, educational, economic, institutional and moral freedoms and responsibilities valued by the society. ²³
<u>Systemic Racism</u>	This is an interlocking and reciprocal relationship between the individual, institutional and structural levels which function as a system of racism. These various levels of racism operate together in a lockstep model and function together as whole system. These levels are: 1. Individual (within interactions between people), 2. Institutional (within institutions and systems of power), and 3. Structural or societal (among institutional and across society). ²⁴

	Please see Individual Racism, Institutional Racism, and Structural/Societal Racism.
<u>Tokenism</u>	The practice of doing something (such as hiring a person who belongs to a minority group) only to prevent criticism and give the appearance people are being treated fairly. ²⁵
<u>White Privilege</u>	The inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice. This concept does not imply that a white person has not worked for their accomplishments but rather, that they have not faced barriers encountered by others. ²⁶
<u>Xenophobia</u>	Fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners. ²⁷

APPENDIX C: REFERENCES

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APPENDIX D: ENDNOTES

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