

EDITORIAL

Let's save some outrage for treatment of Indigenous people

By [Star Editorial Board](#)

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The killing of George Floyd has reverberated around the world and set off waves of protests against anti-Black racism and police brutality.

Canadians across the country have braved the pandemic to gather in the streets to show their support, express their outrage and demand an end to anti-Black racism once and for all, in all its forms. It's an important and welcome movement.

Anti-Black racism — which plays out tragically in encounters with police and in the less violent, but no less significant, everyday bias and lack of opportunities — is a problem Canadians must face and solve together.

The work doesn't end with tackling anti-Black racism. There's another expression of racism that even now, while Canadians have been moved to protest in the streets, isn't drawing the outrage and demand for action that it should.

Indigenous peoples have long suffered overt racism and insidious bias from individuals and institutions — including the police — throughout Canada. They constantly face racialized stereotypes and stigma, which contribute to a crushing, oftentimes deadly, inequality.

Every measure we have to judge how a population is doing shows Canada is failing Indigenous peoples: poverty and child welfare, addictions and mental health, housing and clean water, education and employment, policing and incarceration.

On policing — the issue thrust into the spotlight by the horrific video of George Floyd dying under a Minneapolis police officer's knee — we need look no further than the cases that have come to light since that video sparked global protests.

In Nunavut, [an RCMP officer drove his truck into a helpless, drunk Inuk man](#), knocking him to the ground before he and four other officers arrested him. That's on video. Then they threw the 22-year-old into a cell with a man known to be violent, who proceeded to beat him so badly that he had to be airlifted to a hospital.

In Alberta, [Athabasca Chipewyan Chief Allan Adam](#) and his wife were stopped by the RCMP, apparently for an expired licence plate, and Adam wound up on the ground with his face beaten and bloody. There's [a dramatic video](#) of that, too.

In New Brunswick, 26-year-old [Chantel Moore from Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation was shot](#) — the family says five times — by the police officer who was requested to check on her well-being.

Excessive use of force and the sometimes deadly escalation of what should be relatively minor interactions with police is one way that racism plays out in our communities. That's true for the Black community, as we know all too well in Toronto, and it's true for Indigenous peoples.

Because, let's be honest, interactions like these with the RCMP and local police are highly unlikely to happen to a young white man, a white couple or a white woman.

It's beyond troubling then that RCMP [Commissioner Brenda Lucki has a hard time seeing this](#) and says "we don't have systemic racism" in Canada's national police force. If she can't even see the problem how can she possibly fix it?

Indigenous people make up five per cent of Canada's population but fully [30 per cent of the federal prison population](#).

That kind of appalling imbalance doesn't just happen. It's not the result of a fair society and equal treatment under the law. It is the result of institutional and structural racism.

Two years ago the Ontario Human Rights Commission found Indigenous children under 15 make up 4 per cent of the provincial population but [30 per cent of children in foster care](#). There's a straight line from those figures to family poverty, inadequate housing, untreated addictions and a woefully underfunded child welfare system — all issues that have long been known but repeatedly put on the back burner.

Across the country more Indigenous children are taken from their homes by children's aid societies now than were displaced at the height of the residential school system.

Indigenous people are less likely to graduate high school and attend university, face more barriers to employment and when they find work their incomes, regardless of educational attainment, are on average significantly less than that of white Canadians.

Black people in Canada do poorly compared to white people on those same markers, and that's what generates much of the anger and demands for change that we're now seeing. Floyd's killing was the spark but it's the tinder underneath that sustains the fire.

But why is the response so muted when it comes to the racism faced by Indigenous peoples?

Tragically, they're so used to mistreatment that Adam was advised by Indigenous elders to stay quiet about his appalling encounter with the RCMP. It took seeing the protest movement launched on behalf of a Black American man to change his mind.

"Because we are a minority and nobody speaks up for us, every time our people do wrong and the RCMP go and make their call, they always seem to use excessive force," Adam said last Saturday. "That has to stop."

He's right.

Canadians, for the most part, know we're not immune to the anti-Black racism that we routinely see on display in the U.S. The protests in Canada and calls to defund and reform the police are all about wanting to end the racism that exists here.

But we should broaden our outrage and demands for change to fit the Canadian context. And that must include Indigenous peoples at every step.