

Position Paper: Statement of Solidarity with Black Canadian Studies Association

We, the executive and membership of the Canadian Association for the Study of Indigenous Education (CASIE/ACÉÉA), would like to express our unequivocal support for the Black Canadian Studies Association (BCSA), its executive, and its membership.

As an organization that is composed primarily of Indigenous scholars and committed allies, we recognize that interpersonal, structural, and epistemological racism is rampant within the academy and visible at Congress. We support the BCSA's assertion that this inequality has been exacerbated by the pandemic. We share their concern that a "virtual congress centres academic individualism at a time when we should be focussing on our collective well-being" ([BCSA Mar. 24 2020 Statement](#)). Academic individualism is at odds with Indigenous commitments to community accountability and collective action, and we have also spent a great deal of time discussing how we can move against a culture of individualism that a virtual conference elevates while still meeting in a virtual setting. While we have taken steps at CASIE to address this through the format of our association's core events, we strongly encourage our colleagues leading Congress to address this valid concern, which was raised in the BCSA's 2020 statement, and to engage in creative planning to develop a space that is welcoming for Black and Indigenous scholars—not just in content, but also in ways of teaching, learning, knowing, and relating.

We also support the BCSA's assertion that the pandemic has worsened social inequality more broadly, and that this dynamic has disproportionately affected Black and Indigenous communities to which our members are connected. We thank the BCSA for pointing out in their statement that these worsening inequalities have also had negative impacts on Indigenous communities, and that shared concerns such as police violence and incarceration continue to be very real and present for Indigenous and Black communities. For this reason we stand with the BCSA in calling out anti-Black racism, in full knowledge that in challenging anti-Black racism we challenge the system of colonial White supremacy that marginalizes us all.

We also recognize that Black scholars have a specific history of exclusion at Congress; this was particularly visible in the treatment of BCSA scholar Shelby McPhee at Congress 2019, both in his initial mistreatment and in the subsequent actions of conference officials. It is clear to us that systemic action at all levels of Congress must be taken over a committed period to address the epistemological, structural, and interpersonal racism that is present.

We were glad to see that the Federation has taken the step of waiving fees for students and members of the general public who self-identify as Black or Indigenous—this is a much needed measure to ensure that our communities have access to research by, for, and about them. As Dr. Marie Battiste, a much-esteemed leader in our academic community often says, *Nothing about us without us*. These words echo a mantra from the disability rights movement that has grown into a truth for principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP). These principles need to extend beyond the research design and data collection phase to knowledge

mobilization, including knowledge mobilization in primarily academic settings. As the preeminent venue for knowledge mobilization amongst scholars in the humanities and social sciences in Canada, it is only right that members of our communities not be asked to pay to access information at Congress that they own and must have the right to access, possess and control ([First Nations Information Governance Centre](#)).

While we were also glad to see a commitment from the Federation to “prioritize Black and Indigenous experience and scholarship in Canada” ([Federation Feb. 11 2021 Statement](#)), including featuring Sheila Watt-Cloutier and Ibram X. Kendi in the Big Thinking Lineup, we believe their commitment must go beyond that. Notably, the BCSA in their most recent statement has highlighted the fact that they did not recommend Ibram X. Kendi as a Big Thinking speaker, and we wonder how the Federation might better attend to the BCSA’s recommendations. The experience of racism that BCSA scholars are talking about, and that CASIE scholars are also concerned about, isn’t about the presentation of our scholarship or access to Black and Indigenous speakers. It’s about the wider experiences of racism at the conference and the continued disregard of Black scholarship and ways of knowing, and those of Indigenous and other marginalized communities, more widely within the academy. The Big Thinking discussions are optional events that will likely attract participants who are already interested in decolonizing and anti-oppressive action.

We need to address this issue systemically in a way that involves all conference participants in a conversation about what racism is, at all levels. These conversations on what we can do to dismantle colonial, racist, and oppressive systems are for everyone, not a self-selected audience. Until that happens and education reaches all conference attendees, Black and other marginalized scholars will continue having experiences of racism at Congress. For that reason, we call on the Federation to follow through on their commitment to have a declared theme of Black Studies at a face-to-face conference in the very near future in keeping with the BCSA’s reasonable request. We also call on the Federation to find ways to continue the broader conversation after the themed conference so that we can all engage together in the difficult, long, and vital work of decolonizing, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive action within the Federation and the academy.

We welcome further dialogue and responses within and beyond our own association, as well as opportunities to build understanding and solidarity across mutually entangled webs of relationship.

All our relations,

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