



Black Canadian Studies Association

March 21, 2020

Dear Black Canadian Studies Association members and supporters.

We write to give you an update on the status of the Black Canadian Studies Association's Conference, 2020.

Thank you for the ways you have supported the Association during this past year. Since Congress 2019, we have been working diligently in support of our members, representing our membership with the Federation and planning for our upcoming conference at Congress 2020.

On Wednesday March 18, 2020, the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences held a meeting to discuss the plans for Congress 2020, which was scheduled to be held from May 30th – June 5th, 2020 at Western University. Representatives of the Federation stated that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it will not be possible to host on-site, in-person meetings. Instead, they were excited to announce the decision to move Congress 2020 to an online format – “virtual Congress 2020” – and invited member associations to “join them in this new adventure.”

It was obvious in the meeting that the deliberations between the organizers from the Federation and Western University had not considered how this change of medium would impact or differently determine the Congress theme, **Confronting Colonialism and Anti-Black Racism**. In fact, there was also reference made to the “success” with which several universities have transferred their in-person courses online in recent weeks – a misguided attempt to normalize the business of an online post-secondary education as a priority in these unusual and uncertain times. Working conditions for Black people in the academy are already challenging. These business as almost-usual moves are additional, unacceptable and unreasonable expectations.

The BCSA executive held an emergency meeting immediately after the March 18th meeting. We discussed our concerns, particularly regarding how the virtual format will drastically compromise and undermine the conference theme for which we struggled. We then sent a note to the president of the Federation stating that we were not in support of Congress moving ahead in a virtual format, and asking the

Federation to reconsider this decision. The Federation decided to move forward anyway, and on March 19th, released [this statement](#).

The Black Canadian Studies Association is declining the Federation's invitation, and will not be hosting our Annual Conference at "virtual Congress 2020." We therefore regretfully announce the cancellation of the 2020 BCSA conference, *The Futures of Black Studies in Canada*, scheduled to take place at Congress from May 31st – June 3rd, 2020.

This is a great disappointment of course. The BCSA executive has been working on organizing and was eager to host this year's conference. Our excitement was increased by the overwhelming number of proposals for panel presentations, papers, artistic interventions, exhibitions, and community involvement that we have received. We had a series of plenaries planned with Black scholars, activists, and artists from across the country, and across disciplines. We had received considerable support from the Federation in our application for a SSHRC Connection Grant and had been collaborating with the team at Western to especially (and specifically) welcome Black faculty and graduate students and ensure as much access to the conference as possible.

We remain committed to hosting a conversation on the Futures of Black Studies in Canada. It has become clear that these recent events simply highlight again the need for this pressing conversation to happen in the near future. While we remain steadfastly committed to that end, this will not happen at virtual Congress 2020.

The plan to host a virtual Congress largely fails to consider and remain accountable to those most vulnerable among us. As stated by other associations (Society for Socialist Studies, Canadian Sociological Association), going online is not a simple nor always easy option, and far from error-proof. Moreover, the Federation's plan is for this online format to be accessible only to paid attendees. The BCSA executive refuses the logic of neoliberal academia that assumes moving our work online to be an effective response in these times. We instead wish to take the time to think more critically about how to make the BCSA and participation in our annual gathering more accessible, and how to support the many already overburdened Black faculty, staff, and students.

We had envisioned a conference that intimately imagined a future of Black Studies in Canada, and we feel this to be an even more pressing undertaking in our current moment. Instead, the organization of a virtual Congress further centres academic individualism at a time when we should be focussing on our collective well-being. How exactly does this action animate the theme of confronting colonialism and anti-black racism? This is the time to re-imagine anti-colonial activism in the time of physical and social distancing. This is the time to be exploring the role of humanities

and social sciences within the context of global pandemics. This is the time to consider as scholars how we move forward.

Hence, on [this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#), we reiterate that the Black Canadian Studies Association will not be participating in virtual Congress 2020. Furthermore, we call on other associations to withdraw from Congress 2020 before the March 27th deadline and join our demand that The Federation and Western University cancel the event.

When we are able to meet in-person in the future, we call on the Federation to work collaboratively with academic associations *and* community organizations to construct and develop an appropriate Congress that effectively addresses the theme of Confronting Colonialism and Anti-Black Racism.

For those who have already registered, you may request your refund [here](#) or contact the Federation at congress@ideas-idees.ca by April 30, 2020.

Please note that the refund deadline has been extended to April 30, 2020 and the \$25 administration fee has been waived.

The article, [How to Create an APA Style Reference for a Canceled Conference Presentation](#), may also be useful.

Reflecting the important work that has taken place over the past year, the BCSA has experienced a surge in our membership and we intend to continue to build on this momentum. We will be in touch with our 2020-2021 membership in the coming weeks with updates and information as the COVID-19 crisis unfolds and further decisions are made.

Yours sincerely,
BCSA Executive