

Update and Statement from the Black Canadian Studies Association (BCSA) Regarding anti-Blackness and racial profiling at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences

June 7, 2019 [\[corrected June 25, 2019\]](#)

The Black Canadian Studies Association would like to acknowledge the tremendous response to the anti-Black racism and racial profiling of one of our members at Congress and failure of the Federation to respond appropriately. These events are documented in our [open letter of June 4, 2019](#) and have been reported in the news media (see [CBC](#), [Vancouver Daily Hive](#), [Halifax Today](#), [Global News](#)). Following our letter, Congress attendees, fellow member associations, academics, student groups, activists and community members throughout the country have been sharing their concern and support for Shelby McPhee and the BCSA collectively holding the Federation and therefore, all of our associations accountable. This entire situation and outpouring of responses reflect the critical need for open conversations, collective responsibility and action toward addressing anti-Black racism and its deep institutionalization throughout Canadian society.

This situation is ongoing. Since the release of our letter we have been contacted by other witnesses to the incident. One of these is another student attendee, who is an Indigenous woman from Asia. During the incident she courageously offered her support to Mr. McPhee and remained present to bear witness to what took place. Having both witnessed and been subjected herself to police intimidation, this student not only held her ground at the time, but has made herself and her story known to us, asking how else she can support Mr. McPhee and the BCSA in this situation. Her personal and political commitment and willingness to act in solidarity (at risk to her own security and safety) is instructive for all and stands in stark contrast to the Federation, whose priority has seemed to be managing a public relations issue as quickly and with as little commitment to change as possible.

On ^{June} July 5th, the day following the release of our open letter, the Federation issued a statement that neither contains an apology to Mr. McPhee, nor acknowledges our letter. This original statement, decontextualized and falsely framed the incident as an interpersonal conflict between individuals that Federation executives are being called upon to adjudicate. The Federation reiterates that it stands by its Code of Conduct, while committing to no appropriate action in that regard.

Similar limitations characterize the June 5th statement released by the UBC Equity and Inclusion Office, that tellingly articulates that office's commitment to "supporting the Federation in its investigation of this incident," instead of supporting Mr. McPhee or facilitating the needs of the BCSA.

On the night of June 5th, the BCSA received a **second** response from the Federation, via a letter from the President that was then also issued as a media release on the Federation's website. In the letter, President Patricia Albanese extends an apology from the Federation "for

the pain and suffering” inflicted upon Mr. McPhee on account of having been racially profiled, without addressing the Federation’s own furthering of the racial violence following the incident through their own disregard for Mr. McPhee and refusal to act immediately. The response does not articulate a commitment to meeting [all four of the BCSA demands](#), which remain non-negotiable and **all of which have received overwhelming support from multiple associations within the Federation.**

Today, June 7th, we have been informed in an email from Executive Director of the Federation Gabriel Miller, that the BCSA association fees (\$500.00) will be waived for the 2020 Congress. What remains then, is for the Federation to (a) clarify that it will ensure the delivery **of a letter from the BCSA** to the two accusers; and (b) commit to the addition of “Confronting anti-Black racism” or “Confronting anti-Blackness” to the 2020 Congress **theme**, an amendment already endorsed by a large number of member associations. This is not merely an issue of critical discussions of anti-Black racism and racial profiling being integrated into the Congress programming--these are serious historical and current issues in Canada and that should be a given! To foreground confronting anti-Blackness as part of the Congress theme, on the other hand, will animate a commitment that the Federation has already stated to opposing and denouncing anti-Black racism, racial profiling, harassment and discrimination of any kind. This is not only a crucial aspect of responding to incidents of racism at Congress 2019, but also an absolutely necessary focus for scholars and administrators seeking to eliminate such incidents and to dismantle the institutional structures and practices that facilitate and enable them. In essence, confronting anti-Black racism is essential to any efforts to decolonize the Canadian University, which one would assume is a given based on Universities’ stated commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Once the above commitments from the Federation have been confirmed, the BCSA executive anticipates collaborating with the many other member associations who have come forward, and with the Federation executive, to further disrupt anti-Black racism, and support ongoing critical work in Black Studies. There remains much, long term work to be done on the part of the Federation in developing the analysis and critical praxis necessary to realize a goal of “providing a harassment-free Congress experience for everyone, regardless of gender, gender identity and expression, age, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, or religion (or lack thereof).”

The BCSA will continue to insist that our association and members are respected. **We maintain that the Federation must not only respond appropriately to what has happened to Mr. McPhee, but also commit to the challenging, long-term work of addressing systemic, widespread anti-Blackness and all forms of racism.** We will ensure that this conversation remains open and transparent as reflective of our role as an association that is accountable, beyond academia, to Black people and communities throughout the country.

In closing, we call attention to this situation as exemplary of the additional and taxing labour that racialized students and academics face day-to-day, as we endure and respond to anti-Blackness, racial discrimination and violence within academic settings assumed progressive.

This situation unfolded amidst the annual conferences of a vast range of professional associations to which our members belong. Our responsibility to respond immediately required us to miss invaluable opportunities to attend sessions and events with colleagues and to enjoy collective dialogue and critical interdisciplinary exchange. The BCSA annual general meeting had to be extended to three meetings over two days, as responding to the harm that had been done to Mr. McPhee and to our membership collectively, was added to our planned agenda. Despite these and other challenges, the BCSA remains a strong and growing organization with a diverse and transdisciplinary membership from across Canada. We are indebted to the leadership and dedication of our outgoing executive, most notably to Dr. Afua Cooper, our BCSA President for the entire first decade of our association's existence. We are excited to continue our important and critical work together, which is not limited to countering anti-Black racism, but which also includes that of the diasporic, transnational, and interdisciplinary study and affirmation of Black life. The 2019-2020 executive members of the BCSA are:

Co-Presidents: Professors [OmiSoore Dryden](#) and [rosalind hampton](#)

Vice-President: Professor [Philip Howard](#)

Treasurers: Professor [Claudine Bonner](#) and [Sam Teclé](#)

Secretary: [Sawyer Carnegie](#)

Student Representative: [Jamilah Dei-Sharpe](#)

Members at Large: [Dr. Roberta Timothy](#) and Professor [Cheikh N'Guirane](#)

Past President: Dr. Afua Cooper

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