



Black Canadian Studies Association

To the Congress attendees who racially profiled Mr. Shelby McPhee on June 2, 2019 at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, University of British Columbia, Vancouver BC

June 24, 2019

The Black Canadian Studies Association (BCSA) is a national association committed to the promotion and support of [research, publication, and curriculum regarding the diverse Black communities in Canada and the Black/African Diaspora](#). Our association aims to promote Black Studies in Canada and facilitate national and international interaction and exchange and networking between scholars, community historians and cultural workers of Black Studies. Given our work, and as the association to which Shelby McPhee is a member, it is incumbent upon us to communicate with you regarding the incident and to address the serious implications of your actions within the national context of normalized anti-Black racism. We are deeply disturbed by the entitlement you assumed to deputize yourselves, engage in the surveillance and questioning of Mr. McPhee, accuse him of theft, and demand that he prove his right to be in the space. Your next decision, to call the RCMP based on absolutely unfounded suspicions resulted in the detention of an innocent person [causing him public embarrassment](#) and placing him at risk of further racialized violence.

We wish to make it clear to you the ways in which your actions are not just a matter of your personal indiscretions and bad judgment. Rather, they were conceived, enabled, and mobilized through the broader social relations and structures that perpetuate anti-black racism.

As your profiling of Mr. McPhee and the events that unfolded thereafter demonstrate, Black people in Canada can never presume that our rights, dignity, and safety will be respected by members of the general population or by institutional and state authorities. Black people are routinely considered out-of-place, subject to suspicion, criminalized, harassed, and brutalized. These are ongoing manifestations of anti-Black social relations that have their roots in colonialism and the historical enslavement of African people in the territories now referred to as Canada.

We ask that you reflect deeply and critically on the manner in which your targeting of Mr. McPhee both reflects and reproduces this broader context of racial oppression and criminalization across this country:

- Although Congress expected more than 8000 attendees, you presumed Mr. McPhee to be out-of-place, and felt entitled to request he prove his right to be there;
- You were convinced enough that Mr. McPhee had stolen your missing laptop—[with no plausible cause for this suspicion](#)— to accuse him of doing so and to follow and photograph him, automatically exonerating the numerous non-Black people in the vicinity;

- You called the RCMP onto a university campus, in order to further pursue your unfounded allegations. You thus forced Mr. McPhee into an interaction with police, a state institution with a well-established history of harming and killing Black and Indigenous people. This demonstrated a disregard on your part for Mr. McPhee's well-being, indeed a disregard for Black life;
- While you subjected Mr. McPhee to this embarrassing and dangerous public spectacle at Congress, one that Mr. McPhee and the BCSA were then required to spend the next several days navigating, you were able to remain anonymous throughout Congress. As far as we know, to date, you have received no consequences for engaging in harassment that clearly contravenes the Congress Code of Conduct and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
- Although your false accusations of Mr. McPhee were proven baseless, you have not taken responsibility for your actions to date. You have not come forward with accountability and an apology to Mr. McPhee or to the BCSA and Congress.

You were wrong. Your behaviour was harmful and dangerous. Individual actions like yours collectively comprise and perpetuate the deeply institutionalized racism that Black people constantly face. Addressing your implication in these relations, and moving toward repairing the harm you have caused in this incident, requires meaningful action, which includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- **Apologize to Mr. McPhee** using any of several channels you have available to you, including by way of the Federation;
- Join the many individuals, university faculty groups, student groups and national association members who have issued public statements and written letters in the wake of these events, asserting their commitment to the long-term work of confronting the anti-Black racism and coloniality of Canadian academia.

We hope that this letter will cause you to sit with the gravity of your actions and how they demonstrate how you are implicated in the routine anti-Blackness that many Canadians continue to deny exists.

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