

A racist province is hard to prove

Craig Offman, National Post

Published: Friday, November 21, 2008

In the past few days, the authors of a \$2-million report on youth violence sounded the alarm, insisting that Ontario was more racist than ever.

"Racism is worse than it was a generation ago, while there are fewer resources and structures to counter this great evil than existed in years past," wrote Alvin Curling and Roy McMurtry this week in an apocalyptic opinion piece that summarized their meetings with visible minority groups, criminologists, and others. "Racism is alive and well and wreaking its deeply harmful effects on Ontarians."

While people on the receiving end of such old-school attitudes might issue a knowing nod, others surely cocked their heads in confusion. Just when it seemed as if we were leaping into a post-racial, Barack Obama future -- in an era when mixed marriages, celebration of diversity and human-rights commissions are commonplace -- this indictment blasts the province back to the Archie Bunker-era.

As harsh as the judgment from the "Review of the Roots of Youth Violence" seemed, there is little hard data in the desk-thumping tome to support it.

Such are the pitfalls of any report that tackles the slippery issue of race.

Interview minority groups exclusively and discussions can turn into listening tours in which preconceived notions are merely reinforced.

If a more formal survey is gleaned from victims, the numbers can be off-the-charts astounding, begging further questions about the sample base. Last May, Trent University professors in Peterborough, Ont., conducted a poll of 64 incoming students, some of them hailing from abroad. Almost 85% of respondents reported racism in public spaces -- incidents that included graffiti, bullying, racist comments, jokes and racial profiling -- and the same percentage of them experienced racism in downtown bars. Around 75% of them reported racism in university residences.

"Of all the public/private spaces studied, none was found to be racism-free," the report concluded.

Interview white groups, on the other hand, and the respondents might simply point out that they live a multi-coloured Benetton world as evidence that racial strife does not exist.

"I think the data show that most people would deny they are racist: only 5% of Canadians say that some races are superior to others," said sociology professor Jeffrey Reitz, adding that 75% of Canadians believe that if minorities have problems such as poverty, they bring them on themselves. "Most people look at numbers like that and say that those people are racist," he said. "You could say that if you define racism that way. but that's not the conventional definition."

Related Topics

[Racial Issues](#)

[Racism and Bigotry](#)

[Supreme Court of Canada](#)

[Alvin Curling](#)

[Archie Bunker](#)

powered by 

Story Tools

[Change font size](#)

[Print this story](#)

[E-Mail this story](#)

Share This Story

[Facebook](#)

[Digg](#)

[Stumble Upon](#)

[More](#)

Story tools presented by

