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Collaborative Unity and Existential Responsibility

BLACK AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING IN MONTREAL: AN INTERSECTIONAL SNAPSHOT

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ABSTRACT

Summary This paper presents a general overview of the challenges faced by English-speaking Black community members in Montreal, as well as the exacerbation of those barriers for individuals with a history of justice involvement. Frontline community initiatives focusing on education, employment, and entrepreneurship at DESTA Black Youth Network are profiled as an example of grassroots efforts to mitigate disparate circumstances between English-speaking Black Montrealers and their white counterparts. Statistical data in the areas of educational attainment, rates of unemployment, and income provide the platform for analysis and, recognizing the multiple identity experiences of belonging to a racialized and linguistic minority, an intersectional framework is employed. Recommendations for more race-based study, policy, and funding to better support equity strategies are provided.

Keywords Black Community, English-speaking, Montreal, Intersectional, Anti-Black Systemic Racism, Justice, Education, Employment, Income, Entrepreneurship

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ANTI-BLACK RACISM AND THE MYTH OF MULTICULTURALISM

The Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism (2017) identifies anti-Black racism as the “policies and practices embedded in Canadian institutions that reflect and reinforce beliefs, attitudes, and prejudice, stereotyping and/or discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and colonization here in Canada” (p.14). Arguably, many Canadians do not fully understand the impact that colonialism has had, and continues to have, on Canada’s Black and Indigenous communities, in particular, and on Canadian people of color, in general. Many Canadians are not even aware of the history of slavery in Canada – but one does not need to have full knowledge of history to be impacted by it or to benefit from its legacy. Like a microcosm of Canada itself, Montreal has long had a reputation as an inclusive multicultural city, when, in reality, it is made up of many solitudes divided along racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic lines. As in other North American cities, systemic racism in Montreal has created barriers to housing, education, employment and, arguably, the acquisition of fundamental human rights for many Black Montrealers. For Montreal’s English-speaking Black community, which occupies the intersection of both racial and language minority, the consequences of those barriers are especially profound. In order to better understand the impact of how these dual identities interact, a cursory introduction to the idea of intersectionality is useful. Coined by American race theorist and civil rights activist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, the term “intersectionality” was derived from Crenshaw’s work to describe the ways that multiple identities and experiences informed by race and gender intersect and affect the lives of Black women and women of color, in particular. The term has since been used to describe multiple identity intersections, such race, gender, class, sexuality, (dis-)ability and more – and how those multiple identities, at times embodying either privilege or oppression, “can combine with each other, compound each other, mitigate each other, and contradict each other” (Oluo, 2017). Although still infrequently used in discussions of race and language in Quebec, the concept of intersectionality provides a suitable framework for understanding the unique experiences of English-speaking Black Montrealers. As a minority within a minority, a racialized minority group laden with the additional challenges of belonging to the Official Language Minority (OLM) population of English speakers in Quebec, the resulting circumstances for English-speaking Black Montrealers can often be precarious.

The purpose of this paper is not to provide an in-depth critical analysis of intersectionality of race and language in Quebec, or a comprehensive study of how colonialism and systemic racism have impacted racialized communities in Canada. Nor will this paper endeavour to provide readers with *proof* of racism; racism is posited herein as a fact, existing in many forms and spaces, from the micro to the macro, and no empirical evidence will be supplied to reinforce that position. It should also be stated that this paper touches on a number of important topics, each deserving of more study and analysis than will be provided here. The aim, therefore, is threefold: first, to present the statistical profile of English-speaking Black Montrealers specifically in the areas of education, employment, and income level to illustrate the challenging realities of occupying a double-minority status in Quebec. The second objective is to briefly describe the exacerbation of those realities for community members with a history of justice involvement. Finally, the third purpose is to emphasize the need for more race-based study and policy revision, and for allocated funding to support community organizations on the frontlines of addressing systemic inequality with innovative and culturally-relevant programs, services, and advocacy work.

STATISTICAL PROFILE OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING BLACK MONTREALERS IN EDUCATION, (UN-) EMPLOYMENT, AND INCOME

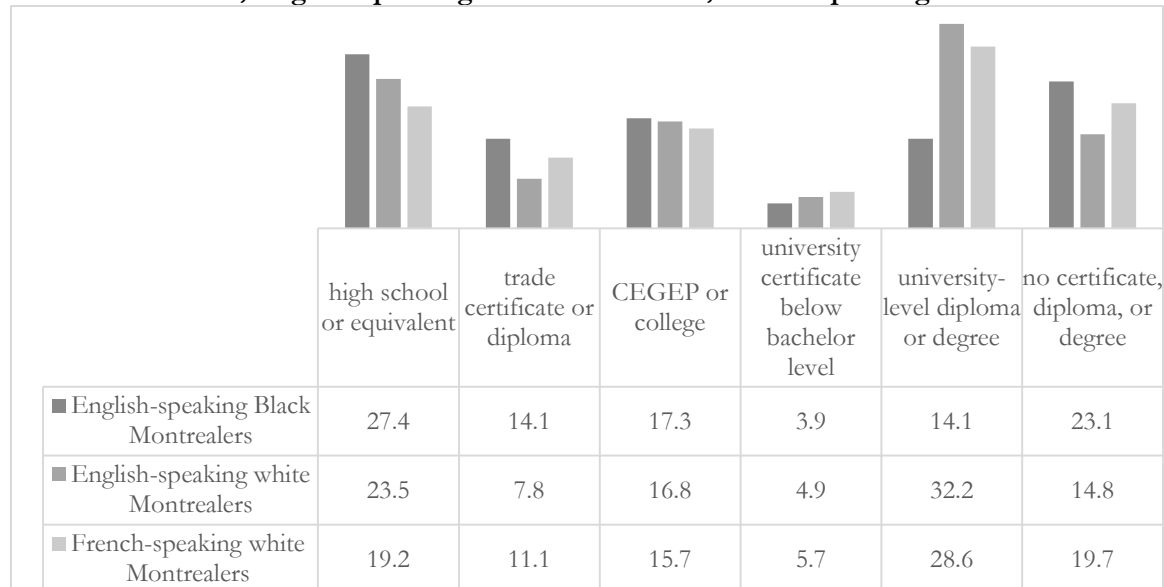
English-speaking Black Quebecers represent the second-largest racial minority group among both Quebec and Montreal Anglophones, with 53,845 in the province (the first largest group in both the

province and the city of Montreal are South Asians, at 59,855). With the majority (40,550) residing in Montreal, English-speaking Black Montrealers make up around 7.5% of the city’s total English-speaking population. *A note about terminology and the use of the uppercase in “Black”:* here Black is used to denote a racialized group that, although widely diverse, is considered a people for the purpose of this paper, and that consideration is reflected in the specificity of the statistical information provided. The uppercase is not used to describe white people because they are (systemically) not regarded as a group, but rather as the standard, with racialized peoples being deviations thereof. The problematic term “visible minority”, used in Canada almost exclusively, is avoided here as it reinforces whiteness as the norm and blurs race-based data when dissimilar racialized groups, uniquely deserving of their individual consideration, are regarded as a whole.

DISCOURAGING LEVELS OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

A look at the highest levels of education attained by Montrealers (Table 1) reveals that a greater number of English-speaking Black Montrealers (27.4%) only have a high school diploma or its equivalent (GED, GDT, etc.), compared to white Anglophones (23.5%) and white Francophones in the city (19.2%). At a rate of 14.1%, English-speaking Black Montrealers are obtaining apprenticeship certificates or trade diplomas at almost twice the rate of their English-speaking white counterparts (7.8%) and, again at 14.1%, earning university degrees at less than half the rate of the same group. (English-speaking white Montrealers have a university graduation rate of 32.2%, and French-speaking white Montrealers a rate of 28.6 %) 23.1% of English-speaking Black community members have no diploma, degree, professional attestation, or certificate whatsoever, putting nearly a quarter of English-speaking Black community members and their dependants at risk of poverty.

Table 1. Highest level of education attained; comparison of three groups: English-speaking Black Montrealers, English-speaking white Montrealers, French-speaking white Montrealers



Source: Pocock, (2016)

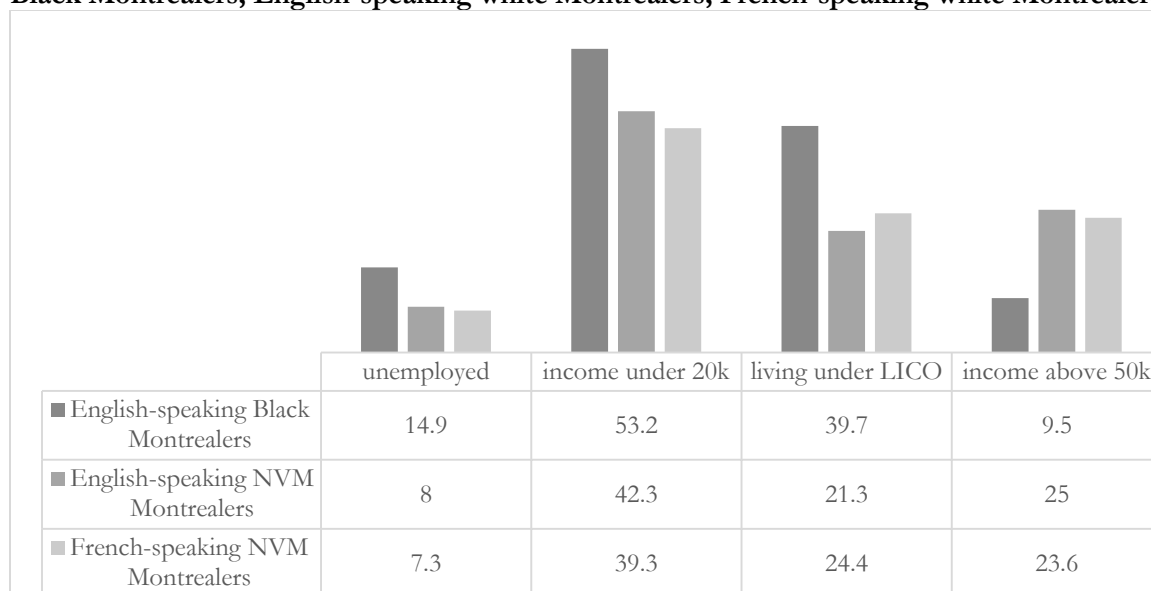
There are many reasons for the discrepancies in educational attainment between English-speaking Black Montrealers and white Montrealers, both English and French-speaking, and a comprehensive understanding requires an examination of the interplay of the systemic barriers that have adversely affected Black Montrealers in general, and English-speaking Black Montrealers, specifically, over several generations. These contributors include, but are not limited to the over-involvement of youth protection services in Black families and the stereotyping of and harsher disciplinary actions taken against Black students at all levels of education. Indeed, a report filed by the United Nation’s Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (2016) called for the implementation of a “na-

tionwide African Canadian education strategy to address the inordinately low educational attainment, high dropout rates, suspensions and expulsions experienced by African Canadian children and youth.” A comprehensive strategy to address the current educational circumstances of Montreal’s English-speaking Black community, in particular, would also need to consider the outcomes of language laws such as Bill 101 that restrict access to education in English for many English-speaking Black children and youth.

GREATER RISK OF POVERTY: (UN-) EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME LEVELS

Almost twice the number of English-speaking Black Montrealers are unemployed (14.9%) compared to English-speaking white Montrealers, who are employed at a marginally higher rate (8%) than French-speaking white Montrealers (7.3%). Little surprise, with a quarter of working-aged community members being formally undereducated, and another quarter possessing only a high school diploma. The subsequent income levels reveal that more than half of English-speaking Black Montrealers (53.2%) earn an annual income under 20k, and almost 40% of wage-earning community members are living under the Low income cut-off (LICO). Only a small percentage of English-speaking Black Montrealers (9.5%) earn over 50k per year, compared to a quarter of both English and French-speaking white Montrealers (25% and 23.6%, respectively).

Table 2. Unemployment and income levels; comparison of three groups: English-speaking Black Montrealers, English-speaking white Montrealers, French-speaking white Montrealers



Source: Pocock (2016)

These discrepancies in education, employment, and wealth provide few opportunities for English-speaking Black community members to position themselves in spaces where policy is decided and power is yielded, a void easily observed in the city’s municipal administrations of past and present. The barriers of systemic racism, combined with what many consider linguistic second-class citizenship, have left the Anglophone Black community underrepresented among Montreal’s most affluent; in fact, many community members struggle to simply earn a living wage.

THREE STRIKES: CHALLENGES FACED BY ENGLISH-SPEAKING BLACK MONTREALERS WITH A HISTORY OF JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT

Where English-speaking Black Montrealers and Black Canadians as whole are overrepresented is, perhaps not surprisingly, in the justice system. Although representing approximately 3.5% percent of the Canadian population, Black Canadians represent around 10% of federally incarcerated people

across the country, and the number of incarcerated Black Canadians has increased every year, growing by nearly 80% over the last 10 years (United Nation's Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, 2016). With approximately half of incarcerated Black people in Canada aged 30 years old or younger, and only 8% over the age of 50 (Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2012-2013), the majority of formerly incarcerated Black community members are within the range of working age. Because Black Canadians receive the longest and severest sentences and, as a result, the least access to programs, training, and education while in prison (Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2012-2013) their ability to successfully reintegrate the community is significantly compromised – assuming they can secure their release; at 72%, Black people incarcerated in Canada receive the lowest rate of parole of any federally incarcerated group (Parole Board of Canada: Performance Monitoring Report, 2016-2017).

Much can be said about the inequalities and injustices embedded in Canada's correctional system(s) and institutions. The context, however, of this particular discussion is simple: with the barriers shaped by systemic racism and language minority status firmly in place for the average English-speaking Black Montrealer, the additional barrier of a history of justice involvement is especially problematic. Numerous studies indicate that securing gainful employment and a living wage is the most critical component for successful reintegration (Pager, 2007), but formal studies are not needed to make that deduction. It is only logical that the inability to secure economic stability and self-sufficiency can compromise one's access to food, housing, and safety, and diminish feelings of purpose and security, – a combination of circumstances that can significantly aggravate the potential for recidivism.

DESTA BLACK YOUTH NETWORK: PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Some small but impactful initiatives addressing the economic challenges in the English-speaking Black community can be found at grassroots organizations like DESTA Black Youth Network. DESTA is a non-profit organization based in Montreal that employs a holistic approach in supporting English-speaking Black community members in reaching their educational, employability, and entrepreneurial goals. Recognizing a gap in services for young Black adults in the neighborhood of Little Burgundy, DESTA was established in 2006 with a youth employability grant from the Government of Canada's Youth Employment Strategy. DESTA staff, comprised of a handful of community workers from the immediate vicinity, initially focused on one-on-one interventions with youth aged 18 to 25, with the majority of non-employment participant needs related to justice issues, housing, young parenthood, and psycho-social challenges. In 2017, as a direct response to the economic circumstances of Little Burgundy's Black community, DESTA redefined its mission to focus on education, employability, and entrepreneurship. As part of the new organizational design, more structured programming was developed to give participants access to diverse training opportunities in various areas. For individuals with employment needs, an 18-week paid data analyst training program was launched to offer participants introductory instruction in data and CRM management. (Other tech-based training programs have since been designed but are not yet underway, including coding, digital marketing, and a digital music production program.) Thinking of participants' various backgrounds, a focus on STEM training programs was adopted, as tech jobs in Montreal are increasingly in demand and generally have lower barriers to entry for individuals with limited formal education and/or a history of justice involvement. Careers in tech can also offer solid entry-level earning potential and the opportunity for upward mobility. In line with recommendations to ensure “access to resources and access to information needed to help individuals create businesses which will enable economic self-sufficiency and create jobs in a community that traditionally experiences extremely high unemployment” (United Nation's Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, 2016), DESTA partnered with the John Molson School of Business' Community Service Initiative in 2017 to offer participants access to a 15-week entrepreneurship training program. To make the program more accessible to working participants, classes take place in the evening, and to increase accessibility for participants with children, childcare services and a meal program is provided at no cost. A

two-week Business Bootcamp was launched a year into the JMSB/CSI partnership to better prepare participants for the immersive 15-week evening program, and to support participant-entrepreneurs at the pre-start up stage of their businesses by providing more introductory-level training and mentorship. Towards the end of 2018, a formal partnership with the Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC) was established. This partnership allows DESTA to offer participant-entrepreneurs one-on-one consulting with experienced business advisors and, at no cost, access to GrowthWheel ©, a visual toolbox and online platform allowing participant-entrepreneurs, mentors, and course facilitators to remotely access and track participants' business growth, and respond to challenges and opportunities in 20 focus areas of business development.

The partnership with CEDEC also provided DESTA with an Adult Learning Specialist, who assisted with the creation of a pilot workforce development program to support participants with little or no work experience, or who have been out of work for some time. The program uses an integrated learning approach and offers participants training in both employability and soft skills, as well as essential skills integral to tech employment. Centering the unique needs and experiences of participants, the culturally-relevant design and content of the program not only considers the realities faced by English-speaking Black job-seekers in Montreal, but gives participants safe space to discuss their experiences openly. To address low high school graduation rates, DESTA provides a distance education program, allowing participants to complete secondary school at their own pace with the support of carefully selected tutors. Literacy classes in both English and French are provided at no cost to participants and, for individuals further along in their studies, support accessing vocational training and post-secondary education is provided. To ensure basic needs can be met, stipends are available to participants involved in full time literacy and/or educational programming at DESTA, and a bursary fund was established to support participants with tuition costs and start-up capital for their businesses. For English-speaking Black community members coming out of incarceration or with a history of justice involvement hindering their ability to secure or retain employment, structured Reentry Services were designed with the support of the Association des services de réhabilitation sociale du Québec (ASRSQ) to complement DESTA's three areas of programming. Participants accessing Reentry Services are provided with the extra support needed to prepare for job interviews and challenging workplace dynamics, and acquire the skills fundamental to success in the workplace.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

With barriers informed by (scarcely) covert racism and overt linguistic second-class citizenship in place, it is not surprising that there are stark discrepancies in academic achievement, employment, and income levels between English-speaking Black Montrealers and their white counterparts. In October of 2016, the United Nation's Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent stated that in spite of "Canada's reputation for promoting multiculturalism and diversity... Canada's history of enslavement, racial segregation, and marginalization, has had a deleterious impact on people of African descent which must be addressed in partnership with communities." Community groups and organizations are indeed perhaps in the best position to do the most impactful work, with the informed and intuitive understanding offered by lived experience and a frontline perspective. Government bodies would do well to refer to the UN Working Group's recommendation to "provide funding and other resources to African Canadian community-based projects" such as DESTA's, and to consult with service providers working at the grassroots level whose expertise, often absent from policy and fund development processes, is essential to the successful alignment of needs assessments, goals, and outcomes. In order to support these important initiatives, more consideration of and investment in intersectional race-based study is needed, examining the past and present experiences of all Black communities in Canada and the generational impact of systemic barriers on those communities and their ability to thrive. The UN Working Group similarly called for the adoption of "an intersectionality framework to analyse and address the multiple forms of discrimination on race and other grounds" and stated that "despite the wealth of information and data on socio-economic indicators, there is a serious lack of race-based data and research that could inform prevention, interven-

tion and treatment strategies for African Canadians.” Intersectionality must move beyond theory and be employed as a practice – not only in social justice endeavors, but in all systems and institutions. For English-speaking Black Quebecers and Montrealers this is undoubtedly critical, because if we fail to consider the ways that multiple identities interact, we risk omitting or ignoring the very perspectives and voices that could most readily identify solutions for eliminating inequity.

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