



For immediate release — Tuesday, February 22, 2022

## Being Black in Alberta

**Virtual film screening of *Black Lives in Alberta: Over a Century of Racial Injustice Continues* available on Wednesday, February 23**

Anyone wanting to learn more about what it's like to be Black in Alberta is invited to attend the virtual screening of a collaborative film project sponsored by the Lethbridge Diversity & Inclusion Alliance, the United Way of Lethbridge and South Western Alberta and the Centre for Oral History and Tradition (COHT) at the University of Lethbridge.

The film is the brainchild of Deborah Dobbins, president of Edmonton's Shiloh Centre for Multicultural Roots (SCMR), a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of the African Americans who came to the Prairies in the early 1900s. Dobbins teamed up with Dr. David Este, professor emeritus with the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary, and Dr. Jenna Bailey (Bailey & Soda Films), senior research fellow with COHT.

The film, *Black Lives in Alberta: Over a Century of Racial Injustice Continues*, tells the story of five generations of Black Albertans and their experiences of discrimination living on the Canadian Prairies. The film provides historical background and four descendants of these immigrants share their family histories and discuss how their racial identities have shaped their experiences living in Alberta. A teaching guide to accompany the film has also been developed.

*Black Lives in Alberta* builds on *We are the Roots*, an award-winning documentary that tells the story of the 1,000 to 1,500 African Americans who came to Canada in the early 1900s to escape discrimination and mistreatment in the United States. The African Americans largely settled in small, rural communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan. In Canada, they also faced discrimination, especially in the cities.

"We were very successful laying the foundation with *We are the Roots*," says Dobbins. "That documentary was well received and the information really opened up people's eyes and started a conversation. Then we needed the 21st century opinion and what it is like now for our young people."

“This film with the four participants sheds light into some of the major issues facing young Black youth in Alberta and destroys the myth that racism does not exist in Canada,” says Este. “These are two strong reasons why the documentary should be viewed.”

Bailey, who directed the film, was impressed with how comfortable the young adults were in talking about issues of race and dealing with discrimination every day.

“The best part of this project is how much I learned personally from the four individuals who were willing to share their stories,” says Bailey. “They were so well-spoken, eloquent and thoughtful and that’s because this is something they’ve dealt with their entire lives. I think Albertans and Canadians can learn a tremendous amount about discrimination in their own country from these four individuals who shared their experiences.”

Dobbins says a first step would be for the average Albertan to acknowledge that racism is present and has been since before Confederation. That could be the beginning of an honest but difficult conversation, as long as the intention is to move forward to a place of equity where the colour of someone’s skin, the language they speak or the disability they live with don’t matter — only their merits do.

The film was commissioned by the Aspen Foundation for Labour Education, an organization dedicated to empowering citizens with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow them to fully contribute to a healthy, just and democratic society through participation in labour and social justice initiatives.

“Aspen was pleased to work with SCMR and Bailey & Soda films to create this film and the accompanying teaching resource,” says Laura Collison, executive director of the Aspen Foundation for Labour Education. “The story of early Black settlers on the prairies is often unknown and many materials present a whitewashed version of this time in Canadian history. The interviews with young Black Albertans sharing how they navigate discrimination today helps make the material relatable to students. The teachers’ guide not only builds on the *BLIA* film, but also offers many activities and resources teachers can use to help students learn about and address racial injustice.”

The teaching guide that goes with the film identifies five learning outcomes and outlines numerous activities within each outcome. The kits will be publicly available after May and can currently be accessed, along with one-time access to the film, by contacting SCMR by email at [shilohcmr@gmail.com](mailto:shilohcmr@gmail.com).

“This information should be embedded in the curriculum,” says Dobbins. “We want our youth to be proud and to see they’re included as they grow up through the educational system and every other system.”

The film is approximately 30 minutes long and the screening will be accompanied by a guest panel, including two of the four young Black Albertans interviewed in the film. The event,

scheduled for 6 to 7:30 p.m. via Zoom, is free and donations are being accepted to the United Way's Unification Project Fund, which supports local anti-racism and anti-discrimination education programs and projects. Those wishing to attend can [register online](#).

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