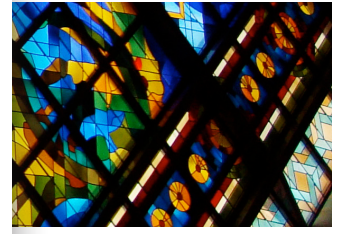


# 40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



## Our Racist History Leads to Our Racist Present

DAY 27

*Beth Baskin*



### Learning

*Beth Baskin*

Many Canadians pride ourselves on being different from Americans. We like to believe collectively that there is no racism here—and we are also polite!

Being polite can make the racism harder for some to recognize. I would say our desire for politeness leads directly to our denial of racism in Canada for some. I would not be alone in this assertion.

In her 2017 piece for *Maclean's Magazine* Melayna Williams says, “But this Canadian niceness is worth a closer look, particularly because “nice” is how the world often defines us and how Canadians define themselves. Yet it’s used to erase and undercut many things that aren’t so nice. Niceness has historically been utilized to undercut progress toward dismantling systemic oppression.”

Tayo Bero explores this phenomenon for us as Canadians in her summer 2020 *Walrus Magazine* article: “Canada markets itself as

a country built on polite tolerance and kind-hearted multiculturalism while, at the same time, Black people are harassed, targeted, and surveilled, even within their own communities.” She goes on to say, “One of the more effective tools of Canada’s denial has been historical revisionism, which means the country is frequently painting its past atrocities in favourable light.”

In my experience, being polite can lead us to re-shape the stories we tell ourselves. Think about your own family histories or stories that you learned. Were these stories told one way for much of your life? Are there stories that you later discovered had a difficult reality or deeper truth that was initially not acknowledged?

Canadians officially celebrated the welcome of over 40,000 refugees received in Canada between 2017 and 2019, but we don’t often tell the story of *Komagata Maru*. This was a ship from India with about 375 passengers, who were turned away from the Vancouver Port in 1914. Canadian legislation and judicial processes blocked them from even disembarking. The passengers then faced violence and imprisonment in Kolkata upon their return to India. By 1914, Canada had been blocking the immigration of people from India for six years. We also blocked immigration from China from 1923 to 1947.

In 2018 we celebrated 40 years of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, which is worth acknowledging, but even this program and our current overall immigration plan do not actually meet the needs of the world’s population of over 8 million displaced persons.

There have been moments of apology for the exclusionary immigration history based on colour and country of origin, but the lament does not last long, and although Canada is less likely to turn boatloads of people away, we still deny people's humanity in a multiplicity of ways.

When Canadians deny the exclusionary nature of our systems, we are denying the humanity of a huge number of people who live in Canada, including Indigenous peoples who were here prior to colonization.

We want to be polite people who are respectful and kind to one another, but that may require some impolite behaviour as we tell the "inappropriate" life-denying stories of our history and actually understand our racist past to create an anti-racist present and just future.



## Faith Reflection

*Beth Baskin*

Creator God

We are All Beloved Children of God.

Some of us have discounted and degraded siblings,

some of us have been discounted and degraded,

Some of us live with the pain of racism experienced by us and by the generations before us,

some of us live with the benefits of racism perpetrated by us and by the generations before us.

Our present is shaped by our past.

Help us acknowledge our past, so that the wrong actions can be named.

Help us acknowledge our past, so that the pain caused can be owned.

Help us acknowledge our past, so that resiliency and strength can be celebrated.

Help us acknowledge our past, so that we can move beyond the racist systems and structures.

Help us create a present that our descendants will be proud of.

Let us challenge racism in the here and now

Let us shape communities that honor the personhood of each one

May it be so! Amen!



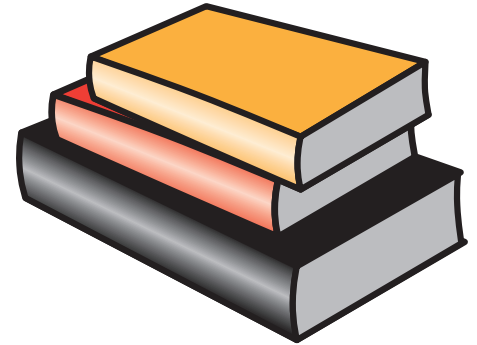
## Children's Activity

Beth Baskin

Over time, more and more children's books have been written about people who are Indigenous and racialized. The challenge, however, is to find stories written by people who are Indigenous and racialized. Too often, books are written from White perspectives about different racial groups. It's important for people to be able to tell their own stories, from their own experiences. As a result, you

may have to do a bit of research! Black History, Asian Heritage, or Indigenous People's month resources from your local library are one place to start.

A book you could share with children is [\*Amazing Black Atlantic Canadians\*](#) by Lindsay Ruck and James Bentley. What children's books have you found that are written by Indigenous and racialized authors?



## Group Commitment

Beth Baskin

This theme was chosen as a result of reading some recent books that accurately revealed Canada as a country that systemically marginalizes specific groups of people. You are encouraged to embark on your own historic journey by reading:

[\*Chop Suey Nation: The Legion Cafe and Other Stories from Canada's Chinese Restaurants\*](#) by Ann Hui

This book may seem to be a delightful exploration Ann's own family history and small-town Chinese restaurants, but it clearly reveals systemic racism and reminds us of other racist practices such as the Chinese Head Tax and the outright ban on Chinese immigration in the 19th century.

[\*They Call Me George: The Untold Story of Black Train Porters and the Birth of Modern Canada\*](#) by Cecil Foster

This book begins in 1954 with a train full of porters taking their case to Parliamentarians in Ottawa. The physical journey is echoed by a journey through time that lays out the many events and circumstances that led to a Black-only role of porters on Canada's trains well into the 1960s.

After reading about the country's racist past, what might you commit to do differently to work towards an anti-racist future?

The [\*Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21\*](#) has a good summary of Canada's appalling immigration past.

The Canadian Encyclopedia provides some more in-depth information on [\*The Komagata Maru\*](#) and the [\*Chinese Immigration Act\*](#) amongst other less told histories.

In terms of spiritual discipline, incorporate the Prayer Cycle for [\*United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent\*](#), in your personal or communities' prayer practices.

You might also want to read [\*Do Better: Spiritual Activism for Fighting and Healing from White Supremacy\*](#) by Rachel Ricketts.



## Advocacy

*Beth Baskin*

Do research in your local community to uncover hidden histories. Being curious often reveals history beyond what is presented. A colleague regularly drove to their cottage on Negro Creek Road in Southern Ontario. When she started asking questions, she discovered the history of Black settlers to Grey County. Their presence is largely invisible now.

Have you ever wondered about the origins of a place you have visited, or a place you regularly go to? Give it some thought and time for research and discovery. Once you know the hidden story of racial discrimination, share what you have learned on social media, in chats with friends and family, or in a Sunday Service or related event.

CBC provides a current picture of [Being Black in Canada](#); this might be a starting place for education or advocacy.

Read an example of personal exploration of early Black History in [this article](#) from the Toronto Star.



**Beth Baskin** is a Network Coordinator in the Identity and Mission Cluster for The United Church of Canada based in Toronto, ON. She is a learner, facilitator, and justice seeker who is aware of her urban, middle class, middle age, straight, White privilege and uses it as she is able to make her community, church, country, and world better places.

