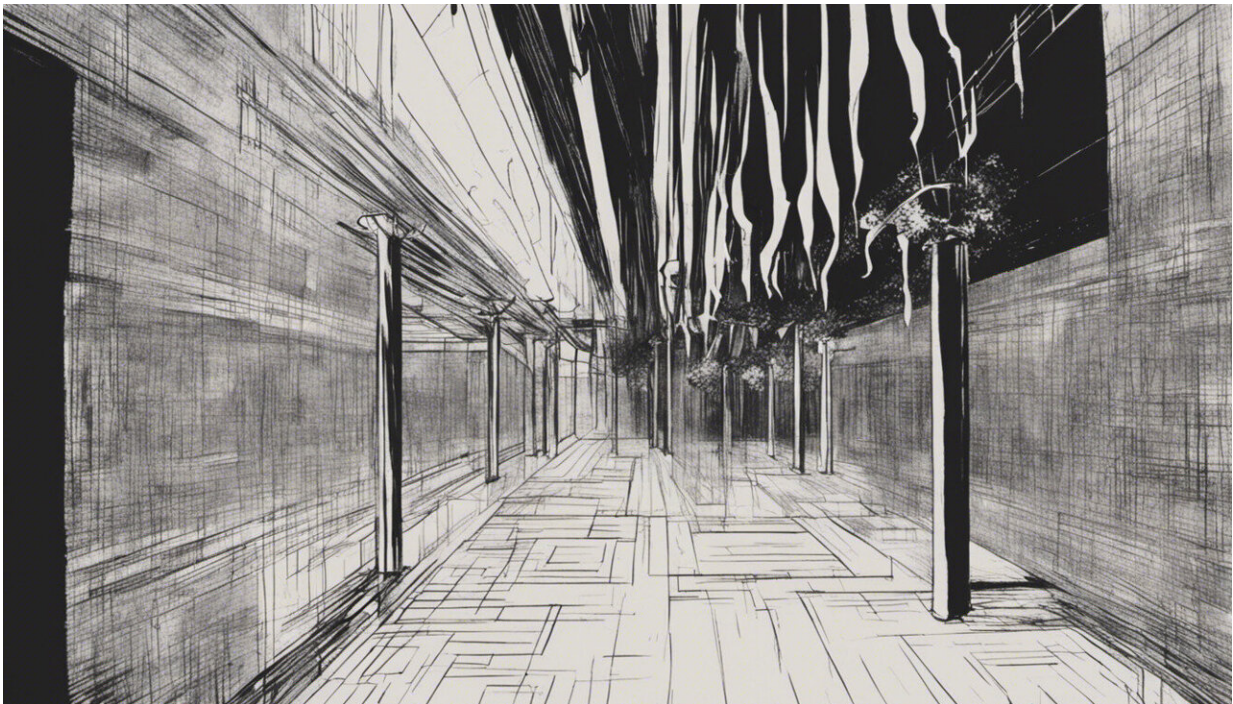


# Living and breathing while Black: Racial profiling and other acts of violence

June 13 2019, by Roberta K. Timothy

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Recently, Shelby McPhee, a young Black male graduate student presenting at the largest Canadian academic gathering, [the 88th annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences](#), hosted by [the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences](#) and held at the University of British Columbia, was stopped by two white delegates and

accused of stealing a laptop. He was photographed and followed. Congress volunteers [called the police](#); both UBC campus police and the RCMP arrived on the scene.

McPhee adamantly refuted the charges but said he was silenced, detained and interrogated by police after [the two accusers gave their testimony](#).

I attended Congress as a [York University scholar of global health, ethics and human rights](#) and a member of the [Black Canadian Studies Association \(BCSA\)](#) founded in 2009. The Congress "brings together academics, researchers, policy-makers and practitioners to share findings, refine ideas, and build partnerships that will help shape [the Canada of tomorrow](#)."

This act of [racial profiling](#) sadly reminded me that African/Black and Indigenous peoples are often [policed and surveilled in traumatic and violent ways](#), in not only [public spaces](#) but also in what [should have been a safe scholarly space](#).

Defending oneself against this type of [racist profiling and surveillance](#) is an act of resistance. As a health scholar, political scientist and psychotherapist working in racialized communities, I can attest to the [detrimental impact this fight for survival has on our health](#).

## Trauma

[More and more cases](#) of [racial profiling](#) or "[living and breathing while Black](#)" are [being shared](#) in both mainstream and social media. And the news media has reported McPhee's story. But the story is told of him [as an individual](#) and not identified as systemic. What happens when media is no longer interested? Individualizing racial profiling in media misses the point of systemic violence.

The humiliation, embarrassment and trauma experienced by this [blatant act of racial profiling, however, is not solely about these individual incidents](#). Rather, it is part of an intensified daily experience of systemic racist and intersectional violence that impacts our health and tries to dictate and incarcerate, the spaces and places we occupy.

The impact that racial profiling has had on this young Black scholar and so many of us in the African/Black community on a [daily basis is insidious and systemic](#).

The constant fight to be treated humanely; the battle to prove ourselves innocent when always accused first as guilty, and the resistance and collective mobilization needed, shows our dedication and aptitude to survive in a world where we are continuously restricted and publicly violated.

## **Public shaming and spectacles**

The white community "[lynching](#)" of McPhee, a young Black male scholar, was an open spectacle, reflecting historical and [current anti-Black racist spectacles of the enslaved auction block, scientific racist human zoos, Jim Crow laws in the southern United States, the apartheid pass laws in South Africa and carding and "random" street checks in Canada and globally](#).

I saw a current example of this type of public humiliation of Black people during the NBA Finals. [Mark Stevens, co-owner of the Golden State Warriors, pushed](#) the Toronto Raptors' point guard Kyle Lowry during Game 3. Stevens's actions can be read as a declaration of "ownership" of Black bodies, hence easily violating them. Lowry upheld dignity and constraint. This constraint is too often a [requirement for Black men after dealing with public racist violence](#).

Another instance is the booing from some of the Canadian fans of the Golden State Warriors Kevin Durant, after he fell to the ground with an injury in Game 5 of the NBA finals in Toronto. [Raptors players quieted the crowd](#). But the Raptors fans' reaction reflects a publicly sanctioned humiliation of Black people that are seen as subhuman or having [little feelings](#).

Canada and other nations have worked to create the myth of the ["dangerous Black"](#) or the "Indigenous savage" as part of its nation building story —that Canada belongs to ["law abiding white folks"](#) while [continuing to decimate](#) Indigenous and African/Black communities by delegitimizing their humanness by subjugating us to apartheid-like [public humiliation and scrutiny](#).

## **The equity myth and requesting systemic changes**

Acts of racial profiling have been occurring with frequency [on university campuses](#). In fact, [academia is often a site where inequity and violence are reproduced](#) as unearned white privilege is upheld.

University of Alberta [political scientist](#) Malinda S. Smith and six other critical race scholars across Canada discuss these issues in [The Equity Myth](#) from the perspective of racialized scholars. They argue that we are quite far from achieving equity on university faculties and administrations.

Meanwhile, back at Congress, McPhee was eventually released, no charges were laid and RCMP said they found the charges to be groundless.

McPhee said: "I felt embarrassed ... and I felt there was not a safe place for me at UBC or for my colleagues ...." He also mentioned the fragility of his career: ["I was an invited speaker, so my credibility was now called](#)

[into question if I'm paraded as a criminal.](#)"

McPhee sent a statement addressed to Congress. Based on [the zero tolerance policy](#) of the Federation, he requested the two delegates who accused him be expelled from the gathering. He also asked for a public statement and commitment to ending racial profiling and anti-Black [racism](#).

The BCSA wrote a letter to Congress to [echo the young scholar's requests and to state four distinct demands they believe will help counter systemic anti-Black racism](#).

Congress has [replied with statements](#) to say they are: "taking action to address this issue" and that they " ...denounce anti-Black racism, racial profiling, harassment and discrimination of any kind."

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Living and breathing while Black: Racial profiling and other acts of violence (2019, June 13) retrieved 16 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-06-black-racial-profiling-violence.html>

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