

Celebrating Black History Month

A collaboration between
the Resource Centre for Public Sociology (RCPS) in the Department of Sociology
and the Harriet Tubman Institute (HTI)
York University

Tuesday 9 February 2021, 11:30–1:00pm

Register by February 5

Zoom link will be sent out February 8

Professor Joseph Mensah

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Social (In)justice, Racism, and the COVID-19 Pandemic: *A Precarious Entanglement among Blacks in Canada*

Since Canada is mostly seen as a White settler society, Blacks are routinely tagged as the binary opposite of the “true” Canadian in many identity-related symbolisms and discourses—especially of the us-versus-them ilk—with other minority groups sandwiched between these polarities. In addition to the symbolic and discursive ways in which this Manichean opposition holds true, it is also actualized at the level of social structure *vis-à-vis* the relative positions of Whites and Blacks within the Canadian class system. Consider, for example, the 2016 Canadian Census data which showed that the unemployment rate for Blacks stood at 12.5%, whereas the comparable figure for Whites was only 7.3%. Not only do such differentials clarify what scholars of racism mean by *racialized class structures*, but they also draw attention to questions of how racially differentiated life chances intensify in the context of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This presentation examines the entanglements of race, space, social (in)justice and the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada with emphasis on Blacks in Toronto, where some reliable race-based data on the pandemic are available. Undoubtedly, other visible minorities face similar challenges as Blacks amidst the pandemic, but the focus here is on anti-Black racism, which is deemed more entrenched and quotidian than cognate versions in Canada.

Dr Joseph Mensah is a Professor and former Chair of Geography at York University. His research focuses on globalization and culture; race, gender, and employment; and African development. He has written several journal articles and contributed chapters to numerous books and encyclopedias. Best known among his publications is *Black Canadians: History, Experience, and Social Conditions* (Fernwood, 2002, with second edition in 2010). His latest book (co-authored with Christopher Williams) is *Boomerang Ethics: How Racism Affects Us All* (Fernwood, 2017).



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