UBC historian Henry Yu says it will take more than politeness to address the injustices of discrimination. Carlito Pablo photo.

Exposing economic racism

> BY CARLITO PABLO

From individuals to community groups to various levels of government, Canadians take antiracism seriously as both a mandate and a cause, according to historian Henry Yu.

However, people generally think of antiracism as merely a matter of proper behaviour toward others who may not look or speak the same way they do, says Yu, who is an associate professor of history at UBC.

"We have to expand our notion of what racism is in some sense to go beyond just sort of, 'Do I call you a name or say something about the way you look or the colour of your skin? For as long as I don't do that, I'm not a racist,'" Yu told the *Georgia Straight* in advance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on Friday (March 21). "Well, we need to look at other forms of exploitation, exclusion, and marginalization."

As a resident of the working-class Vancouver neighbourhood of Mount Pleasant, Yu regularly comes across people of various immigrant backgrounds who work multiple low-paying jobs to support themselves and their families. This, according to Yu, is the real and "insidious" face of racism that should outrage Canadians.

"The connection between racism and exploitation, in terms of economic exploitation and powerlessness, has always been the case that there has never been a moment when racial hierarchies have not facilitated or legitimated or covered up this exploitation," Yu said in conversation during a recent conference on Asian migration organized by UBC's Green College and St. John's College.

Yu said that politeness isn't enough if Canadian society as a whole wants to change the situation of migrants and people of colour generally being relegated to the bottom of the labour market.

A number of studies by Statistics Canada show that workers of migrant origin earn less than their Canadian-born counterparts. A StatsCan study released in October 2007 indicates that even the children of immigrants, the so-called second generation—particularly men—face challenges. The paper by researcher Boris Palameta, entitled "Economic Integration of Immigrants' Children", noted that some census data "suggest that earnings returns to education among 25- to 37-year-old Canadian men with immigrant parents vary by parental region of origin".

The paper states that males whose parents came from Eastern and Southern Europe earned eight percent less than those with parents from traditional immigration source countries in North America, and Northern and Western Europe, even though they had the same level of education. Men with immigrant parents from the Caribbean, the Pacific, and Central and South America earned 28 percent less.

"Furthermore, those with parents from Africa or Asia also earned 8% less than those with parents from traditional source countries, despite having nearly twice the rate of university graduation," Palameta's paper said.

Lindsay Marsh is coordinator of the Vancouver-based Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of B.C.'s Safe Harbour program. The provincial-government-funded program trains people who work in stores, offices, and other publicly accessible areas to provide a safe place for those who feel they have not been treated properly or have been denied services that are normally available to others.

These places sport a window decal bearing four people holding hands in a circle, a sign that these spots are a welcoming place for people who may just want to talk to someone, use the phone, or have a glass of water.

The Safe Harbour program is present in 21 communities across the province, with some 350 participating stores and offices, Marsh told the *Straight*.

"Safe Harbour is trying to break down the barriers, and help people understand what is diversity," Marsh said. She cited a study released on December 10, 2007, by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation and the Association for Canadian Studies, stressing that a lot more needs to be done in educating the public about racism.

The study analyzes a survey, conducted by Decima Research for the Department of Canadian Heritage, that found that nearly one in four Canadians feel that their rights have been violated, and that "discrimination based on race, ethnicity or skin colour" is one of the three most common sources of this infringement.

"Those identifying with ethnic and racial groups were also more likely to say that police (8%) and school personnel (5%) were more likely to have violated their rights than did the population on the whole," the study said. ◆

Besides slurs and name-calling, how does racism manifest itself in society today?

TRACY TANG

Chinese Canadian Historical Society of B.C.

"Institutional racial discrimination can be anything, like policies that institutions intentionally or unintentionally enact that disadvantage an entire group of people. Politeness and acting appropriately in terms of racial equality are two different things. You can have someone who does say 'please' and 'thank you' and 'forgive me'...but they could still be a party to very racially discriminatory practices."

LINDSAY MARSH

Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of B.C.

"There are still a lot of issues in communities around racism and hate, whether they're overt acts of racism, or more subtle forms of racism. It is critical that we all work together to recognize the fact that B.C. needs people like newcomers, aboriginal youth, and other diverse community members."

LORENE OIKAWA

B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union

"We also have things like racial profiling and that whole terrorism spectre...We've got that no-fly list now in place, which is just horrific when you think that you could just show up at the airport and be told that you're not going anywhere. It's not just information that's within Canada, but it could also be sent to the U.S....It's based on how you look and your religion, and that's not right."

LAWRENCE SANTIAGO

PhD student, UBC department of geography

"It's both embodied and in everyday practices. Racism is manifested through various ways. It could be a white bus driver asking you to speak without an accent if you're asking for directions and you don't sound like a typical Canadian, which I experienced personally. Or it could be institutional barriers to getting into higher positions...because they think you're not good enough because you're coloured."

Perceptions of discrimination among Canadians

> Nearly one in four Canadians feels their rights are violated "sometimes".
> Men are twice as likely as women to feel their rights have been violated based on race, ethnicity, or colour.
> Thirteen percent of Ontarians, nine percent of Prairie residents, and eight percent of British Columbians feel their rights have been violated based on race, ethnicity, or colour.
> People from Alberta, Quebec, and the Atlantic provinces are the least likely to feel this way.
> Ten percent of Vancouverites feel their rights have been violated based on race, ethnicity, or colour.
> Respondents from Toronto were far more likely to say they belong to an ethnic or racial minority group than those from Vancouver or Montreal.
> Those who identified as ethnic or racial minorities were almost twice as likely as the general population to say employers or potential employers had violated their rights.

Sources: Canadian Race Relations Foundation, Association for Canadian Studies