
Some Good News about Race

By Philip Carl Salzman

We are often told that Canada and the U.S.A. are racist societies.¹ Minority activists denounce white society and demand compensatory measures. Black Lives Matter in Canada declares that “Black Power Matters.”² In the United States, Black Lives Matter campaign against the police on the grounds that the police victimize blacks.³

In universities and colleges, minority and “social justice” advocates demand greater representation of minorities, more minority professors, and more minority visibility at the same time as they lobby for racially segregated living, eating, and recreational facilities.⁴ At Evergreen State College in Washington State, just south of my home province of British Columbia, black student activists demanded that whites absent themselves for one day as a recognition of the importance of black students. Professors who objected were harassed and threatened.⁵ White students are told that they are oppressors, should “check their privilege” and that they have no right to deny minority demands.⁶

In Canada, First Nations, consisting of no more than five percent of the Canadian population,⁷ demand full consultation and veto over government policy. They allege, for example, that the government has not had full consultation with them about marijuana policy.⁸ They also demand a veto on gas and oil pipelines, promising violence if their views are not accepted.⁹

Amidst all the demands from minority advocates and hand-wringing among “social justice” champions, one might think that Canada and the U.S.A. were as racist as ever, or have recently become more racist. The reality is quite different: In Canada and the U.S.A., racial intolerance has declined remarkably.

Recent public opinion surveys in Canada bearing on racial relations tend to focus on multiculturalism and immigration rather than race relations per se. But there are clear indications in those surveys of substantial racial tolerance and acceptance. For example, in a survey on immigration, there has been a turn in public opinion between 2005 and 2015 against too much immigration. But while in 2015, 46 percent of Canadians said that there was too much immigration, only 41 percent said that there were too many visible minorities immigrating. In other words, it was not race that drove the opposition to immigration; Canadians were less concerned about visible minorities immigrating than about the level of immigration generally.

¹ <http://www.macleans.ca/society/is-racism-different-in-canada/>

<https://globalnews.ca/news/3556823/racism-in-canada/>

² <https://blacklivesmatter.ca/>

³ <https://blacklivesmatter.com/>

⁴ http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/csu-black-student-housing_us_57d03c69e4b03d2d4597b491

<https://www.thecollegefix.com/post/42465/>

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/08/university-connecticut-segregated-dorms-black-separatism/>

⁵ <https://pjmedia.com/trending/2017/05/26/police-tell-prof-hes-in-danger-for-not-participating-in-campus-no-whites-day/>

http://www.nationalreview.com/article/448232/defund-evergreen-state-college-student-mob-punishment?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Daily%20Trending%20Email%20Reoccurring-%20Monday%20to%20Thursday%202017-06-02&utm_term=NR5PM%20Actives

⁶ <https://www.bu.edu/today/2018/checking-your-white-privilege-at-the-door/>

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/check-your-white-privilege_us_5a130e2de4b010527d677f08

⁷ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo26a-eng.htm>

⁸ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/senate-cannabis-legislation-indigenous-1.4643590>

⁹ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/indigenous-groups-kestonexl-2017-approval-1.4042381>

<http://nationalpost.com/news/canada/mohawks-threaten-to-block-energy-east-pipeline-saying-project-is-threat-to-way-of-life>

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/trans-mountain-kinder-morgan-court-first-nations-1.4316928>

And this was also true for all surveys between 1995 and 2015.¹⁰ In another survey,¹¹ respondents were asked the following: “Visible minorities now comprise 16 percent of Canada’s population. How would you characterize that proportion? Is it [“too small,” “just about right,” “too large,” “doesn’t matter,” or “don’t know”]? Here are the results:

Too small	10%
Just about right	22%
Too large	9%
Doesn’t matter	55%
Don’t know	4%

An absolute majority of respondents in this Canadian survey said it “Doesn’t matter” what percentage of Canadians are visible minorities. That would appear to be a strong vote against race-based consideration, against racial prejudice and discrimination. So too would be the small percentage at 9 percent of respondents who feel that there are too many visible minorities in Canada. If one supports racial equality in Canada, which I do, these surveys are good news.

In the U.S. whites’ attitudes¹² about blacks have changed markedly over the decades:

Whites’ attitude toward whites going to school with blacks:

1940,	31% approval
1955,	50%
1975,	85%
1995,	96%

Whites’ attitude toward intermarriage with blacks:

1958,	4% approval
1975,	30%
1995,	50%
2007,	86%

Further surveys¹³ show that whites’ attitudes toward blacks have moved strongly toward tolerance and acceptance:

Vote for a black president—white attitudes

1955,	37% would
1997,	95% would

Open access to jobs—white attitudes

1939,	44% in favour
1972,	97% in favour

At the same time, Americans reject racial preferences and affirmative action, and blacks’ support for affirmative action has plummeted:¹⁴

Racial preference for jobs for blacks—white attitudes

1995,	10% in favour
2013,	10% in favour

[no change over time]

Support for affirmative action for blacks—white attitudes

1998,	20%
2015,	10%

[decline over time]

Support for affirmative action for blacks—black attitudes

1963,	92% in favour
2008,	60% in favour

[decline over time]

How does the decline of prejudice and discrimination, and the increase in tolerance and acceptance manifest in peoples’

¹⁰ <https://ipolitics.ca/2015/03/12/the-ekos-poll-are-canadians-getting-more-racist/>

¹¹ <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/research-stats/2012-por-multi-imm-eng.pdf>

¹² http://igpa.uillinois.edu/sites/igpa.uillinois.edu/files/racial_attitudes/Fig1W.gif

¹³ <http://igpa.uillinois.edu/programs/racial-attitudes>

¹⁴ <http://igpa.uillinois.edu/programs/racial-attitudes>

lives? Let us consider acceptance in the most intimate of relationships, in mixed race marriages.

In Canada, many “visible minorities” marry in mixed unions. Japanese-Canadians marry outside their group 78.7 percent of the time. Individuals with ancestry in two or more visible minority groups marry outside their category 64.9 percent of the time. Members of smaller groups of visible minorities marry outside 52.4 percent of the time. Canadians with Latin American backgrounds marry out 48.2 percent of the time. Black Canadians marry non-blacks 40.2 percent of the time. Filipino Canadians, Arab Canadians, Korean Canadians, and Southeast Asian Canadians marry out in the 20 percent range, with West Asian Canadians and Chinese Canadians just below. South Asian Canadians marry out 13 percent of the time.¹⁵

The relatively low level in percent of out marriage among Chinese and South Asian Canadians is probably influenced by two factors, one cultural and the other demographic. Both Chinese and South Asian culture emphasizes extended, multi-generational families, and arranged marriages. The demographic factor is that Chinese and South Asian Canadians are the two largest cultural groups among Canadian visible minorities, the former having 351,640 married couples, the latter 407, 510 married couples. In-marriage reflects the facts that these groups are densely present in some locations, limiting access to outsiders, and that there is a wide range of choice within each group for selecting partners in a marriage union.

In all Canadian unions in 1991, 2.6 percent were mixed; in 2001, 3.1 percent were mixed; and in 2011, 4.6 were mixed. By far most mixed unions were between a visible minority member and a partner who was not a visible minority.¹⁶ The demographic factor here would be that there are many more Canadians who are not members of a visible minority than members of visible minorities.

My children are both in racially mixed relationships. My daughter, adopted from China, is in a long term relationship with a white man, and my son, adopted from Thailand, is in a long term relationship with a white woman. My children’s previous relationships have also been with whites.

In the United States, interracial marriages have increased substantially. In 1967, three percent of all marriages were interracial. By 2015, 17 percent of all marriages were interracial. That means that one out of every six marriages was interracial.¹⁷ These intermarriages reflect the changes in attitudes about race outlined above.

Among American newlyweds, Asians intermarried for 29 percent of the unions, Hispanics 27 percent, Blacks 18 percent, and whites 11 percent.¹⁸ American Indian newlyweds married non-Indians 58 percent of the time.¹⁹

The increased attitudinal racial tolerance and acceptance in recent decades is manifested in the major increase in interracial marriages. As the anthropologist Lisa Edelsward has suggested,²⁰ the apparent increase in racial conflict may well be a result of the increased equality of the races, and the jockeying for influence. The conflict is difficult to deal with, but the increased equality brings us closer to fulfilling our ideals. Even with the apparent increase in conflict encouraged by small numbers of activists, we should not lose sight of the mostly positive race relations we have in North America.

¹⁵ <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/2011003/tbl/tbl1-eng.cfm>

http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011003_3-eng.cfm

¹⁶ <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/2011003/c-g/c-g3-01-eng.cfm>

¹⁷ <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/05/18/528939766/five-fold-increase-in-interracial-marriages-50-years-after-they-became-legal>

¹⁸ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/12/key-facts-about-race-and-marriage-50-years-after-loving-v-virginia/>

¹⁹ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/12/interracial-marriage-who-is-marrying-out/>

²⁰ Personal communication.

About the Author



Philip Carl Salzman B.A. (Antioch), M.A., Ph.D. (Chicago) is Professor of Anthropology at McGill University, appointed in 1968. He founded the Commission on Nomadic Peoples of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, and its international journal, *Nomadic Peoples*, for which he received the IUAES Gold Award. In recent years he has also served as Senior Fellow at the University of St. Andrews, Open Society International Scholar at the American University of Central Asia, Erasmus Mundus International Fellow at the University of Catania, and Visiting Professor at the University of Sydney. Extensive ethnographic field research in Baluchistan (Iran), Gujarat and Rajasthan (India), and Sardinia (Italy) provided the foundation many articles in academic journals, and for book publications such as *The Anthropology of Real Life: Events in Human Experience* (1999), *Black Tents of Baluchistan* (2000), winner of the Premio Pitr–Salomone Marino, *Understanding Culture: An Introduction of Anthropological Theory* (2001), *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State* (2004), *Culture and Conflict in the Middle East* (2008), *Postcolonial Theory and the Arab-Israel Conflict* (2008), and *Thinking Anthropologically 3rd Ed.* (2010). His latest book publication is *Classic Comparative Anthropology: Studies from the Tradition* (2012). In public affairs, he was a member of Middle East Strategy at Harvard (2008-2010), a member of the Board of Directors of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (2004-2012), and is currently a Senior Fellow at the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, a member of the Academic Council of the Canadian Institute for Jewish Studies, a Fellow of the Middle East Forum (2015-), and a member of the Board of Directors of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (2016-). His articles have been published by the Frontier Centre, the Middle East Forum, the Gatestone Institute, the Canadian Institute for Jewish Research, the Macdonald Laurier Institute, and *Areo Magazine*.