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Speaking truth

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(COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALICIA WYNTER AND ANNIE ROWLAND)

TRACY MOORE

Tracy Moore, MA'00, is a familiar face in Canadian television as host of *Cityline*, North America's longest running daytime show. She has been empowering women and promoting diversity for years, and, since the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, has become more vocal on air about issues of racism and discrimination.

(PHOTO BY ALICIA WYNTER PHOTOGRAPHY)

Interviews by Idil Mussa, MA'13
Edited by Mari-Len De Guzman

When video of the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police surfaced on news channels and social media sites in May 2020, it sparked something advocates against anti-Black racism say they had not seen before.

"Having talked about this for 35 years... it was the first time I had heard so many specific reference to systemic racism, and that part of the conversation changed," said long-time anti-racism educator Enid Lee, BA'74 (Brescia). "People often talk about racism as an episode, but the visual experience caused people to see this is not just a one-off thing, but that it has deep roots in the way in which society is structured historically."



Idil Mussa

On June 14, 2021, Lee joined fellow alumni Tracy Moore, MA'00, daytime television host, and Chris George, BA'01, portfolio manager, Hockey Diversity Alliance advisor and BlackNorth Initiative chair, for a discussion moderated by Idil Mussa, MA'13, producer with CBC Radio's *World Report*.

Now based in Santa Cruz, Calif., Lee is an internationally renowned consultant on equitable education.

"I think I've heard the terms 'systemic racism' or 'structural racism' more since George Floyd than I've heard in the 35 years prior to that. Those terms led me to say, 'Okay, we're finally going deep now,'" she said.

Real conversations around racism began to take centre stage as well, says Moore, who hosts the popular lifestyle television show *Cityline*, and has made it a personal mission to elevate diversity and equity on camera and off.

"I've been speaking about race and gender forever, but there was never really a platform to talk about it. What I found was the conversations I was having in private, with my husband or my Black girlfriends, I was now being asked to have in public spaces and very white spaces," Moore said.

This change of climate around racial equity is also happening in sectors that have traditionally been white-dominated. There is now a "resounding understanding" around systemic racism that was never there before, said George, a former professional hockey player, NHL draft pick and Western Mustang (1998-2000) who is now a portfolio manager at Scotia Wealth Management.

He believes the global pandemic that inadvertently forced people to be grounded and more connected, albeit virtually, has also allowed them to draw on some fundamental emotions, like empathy.

"We certainly are in a moment where people are trying to better understand our situation, and then literally asking what they can do to help. I'm optimistic that our community seems to be more connected than ever," said George, whose family of Jamaican origin immigrated to Canada in the late 60s.

Following are excerpts from the panel discussion on how these alumni navigate challenges around racial equity, ultimately becoming influential figures in their own industries and elevating the conversation around systemic racism and diversity.

The Q&A has been edited for length and clarity.

Fighting for diversity on and off camera

Idil Mussa: It's daunting to sometimes feel like you're the only Black person in the room or at the table, especially in decision-making spaces that have been reserved mainly for white people. In confronting anti-Black racism, have you found that a challenge?

Tracy Moore: I've never really been quiet about these things, even before it was discussed widely in mainstream spaces. There was a Beyoncé moment, when she was doing Formation at the Super Bowl, and people were like, 'Oh, she's Black.' I feel like I might have had a moment like that with my viewers who saw me as having a lot of widespread mass appeal. And then it was, 'Oh, she's talking about white privilege. She's talking about microaggressions.'

I felt incredibly isolated living in London [during my time at Western]. Hailing from diverse Toronto by way of Montreal, London's racial homogeneity may have been something I could have gotten used to, if I hadn't been subjected to so many microaggressions.

I loved my graduate class and I'm still quite close with a few women from our program, but being the only Black student in the journalism master's program took its toll.

I felt connected to my racial community in Montreal but at Western [at the time], the Caribbean students' association appeared to be full of rich, Caribbean ex-pats who didn't see value in my lower socioeconomic status. So, while we connected on race, we diverged on class.

I would walk an hour to campus every day to save on bus fare. Yeah, I couldn't swing bus fare. One day on that walk, a man leaned over on his balcony and called me the N-bomb. There was no good reason. It was just a sunny, summer day and this man decided to throw some vitriol my way because he could. It was the first time since grade one that I'd been called out so blatantly and stupidly with that derogatory term.

London felt small and hostile the entire time I was there, and yet I thrived in my program due to great pros and a few good friends. My girlfriends from Toronto also came to visit a few times, which helped alleviate the depression I was slowly sliding into throughout my year there.

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Having this conversation with other Western alumni makes me wish I could do my year there all over again, but with support. I wonder what that would feel like?

IM: Many media organizations are working toward being more inclusive. I'm part of the CBC, and I know we're doing a lot of work in that area. Media companies in this country traditionally have not done a good job of representing Canada's diversity. What do you think needs to happen to make real, lasting change?

TM: We need more sponsorship opportunities, and we need to go way past mentoring. Mentoring is great, but now we need to pull that person up and say, 'I see good things in you. I'm going to get you to where you need to be and you're going to pay that forward to the next person.' We need to be aggressive about sponsorship opportunities in the media, because if we don't diversify the storytellers, we are bound to make the same mistakes on a loop over and over again.

"I absolutely take responsibility for the things I say and for making change. It's the whole reason I got into journalism."

– Tracy Moore

I have seen some differences in the direction and way we do things at Rogers. Our president [of Rogers Sports & Media, Jordan Banks, BA'90] is a really good champion and is hell-bent on making these changes, and I put a lot of stock in him. I've seen my input actually help change the trajectory of certain things we've done over the past year, but what I say to the leaders all the time is, 'I'm in a very visible position of power. I need to know that the interns or receptionists, or people who are coming up in the ranks also have a place where people will listen to them and they can contribute.'

IM: Do you feel a sense of responsibility, as a Black woman with this huge platform, to speak out against systemic racism?

TM: I take great responsibility in what I say. I think there are a lot of people in the spotlight who say, 'I'm not a role model, stop looking at me.' It doesn't matter if I want to be one or not. People are looking to see how I act and what I say. As part of a marginalized community, there is added weight in how we're perceived because, unfortunately, whatever we do is going to be sort of emblematic of the race for some reason. I don't want to disappoint anyone, so I absolutely take responsibility for the things I say and for making change. It's the whole reason I got into journalism.

I was supposed to be a news reporter, so how did I end up on a lifestyle show? That was never the plan. I was supposed to be in war-torn areas, talking about populations that needed help and were underserved – and here I am talking about stilettos and sofas. But what I realized is that even in this lifestyle space, a lot of change can happen. There are a lot of people listening and watching. Even

outside of my job, volunteerism has always been a very big part of my life – making sure I'm in grassroots situations where I'm speaking to kids, or immigrant populations that need my help. That happens off camera all the time, and has since I was in high school. I take the role very seriously and I'm okay with that. It's not going to be forever. I'll be on air for a while, and then I'll be off air and it'll be the work I do off air that really counts. Right now, I'm just using this opportunity to the best of my ability.

A lesson in history

Idil Mussa: You have been fighting against anti-Black racism for decades and when you are changing the status quo, people always want to push back against that. Has that become easier now, or is it still the same for you?

Enid Lee: I have a slogan: "Expect racism, but do not accept racism." Expect it, so I don't have to wonder, 'Why is this happening?' I understand it's structural and systemic. Racism impacts every part of our organizations, our procedures, even those "benign" arrangements such as our information and communication systems. I know we have got to work on those. In some ways it has felt easier because more people seem to understand that now. The regret is that it had to come to this. I understand the challenge, but I'm glad more people are talking about it. You are doing good work if there is pushback; that's what I say in my sessions.

IM: After nearly 30 years advocating and pursuing anti-racist education, what have the biggest learnings been for you and how have they shaped your approach to education?

EL: Let me go back to Western. We had something there known as the 'Black table'. Many Black students used to have lunch at that table and there we had community. Students at the 'Black table' were from everywhere. Caribbean, West Africa... From that community came a lot of help; help just navigating Western, which as you can imagine, in the 70s was pretty white. For instance, when some of us got student jobs at D. B. Weldon Library, we would help each other from the 'Black table' find jobs there.

Another source of my learning were the activities that had taken place at Sir George Williams University, now Concordia, the year before I arrived at Western. Students were protesting the university administration's decision regarding a complaint of racism. The spirit of student anti-racist activism was part of my education around racism.

In addition, I came from Antigua, a small Caribbean island, with godparents and parents who were both educators under a colonial government. My mother was very clear where white people stood – and that was not above her. From family, I learned to be unapologetic about being Black and having other Black people with me.

Family history, community activism, study and writing about anti-racism had an impact on my work as the first race relations supervisor in the former North York Board of Education in 1985. Part of my responsibility involved working with others to implement the policy for Affirmative Action for Racial Minorities, as it was called then. There was a significant difference between the number of white

people who worked at that Toronto school board and the number of people of all other racial groups combined. In fact, only about six per cent of the staff at that district were people of colour. At that time, the district was saying, 'Yes, we want people of diverse backgrounds.' That helped me do the work. When you saw the excellence that came through the door, what could you say? 'Are they here just because they are Black?' No! They are here because they are excellent! And we have missed out on getting them before.

IM: One of the goals of Western's new strategic plan is to create a more equitable and inclusive culture. What advice do you have for the university in achieving this?

EL: Unless we have a historical perspective, we are not going to go as deeply as we should. Western needs to look at its historic record. Philippe Rushton, a psychology professor in the 80s whose research focused on race and intelligence, comes to mind. Know the historical roots of racism within your own institution, so that you will know what needs to be dug up, addressed or turned around. The point of history is not to shame and to defeat; it is to expose, so we can correct, and put emphasis and energy and resources in the right areas.

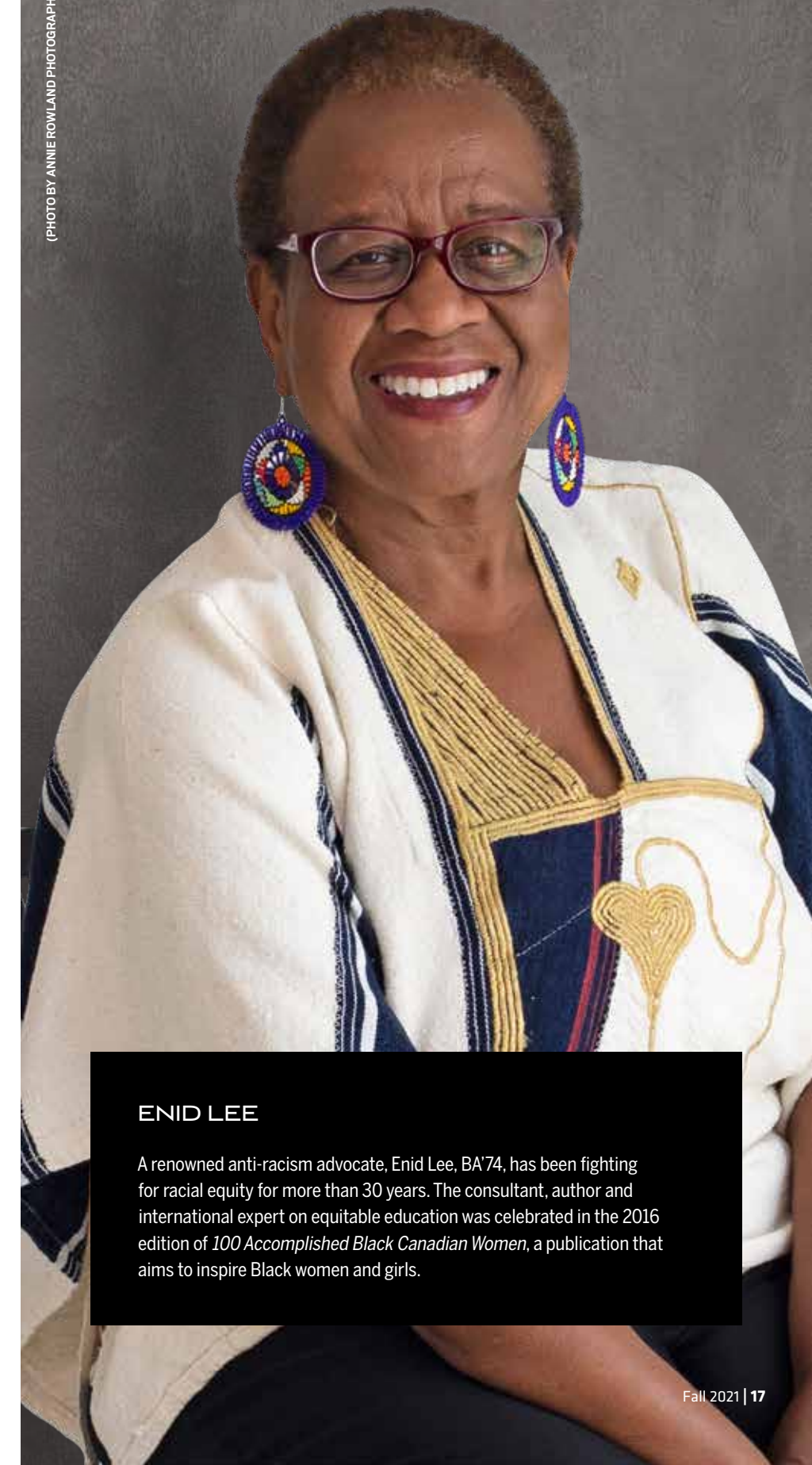
"Expect racism, but do not accept racism."

– Enid Lee

Another component is having a culturally responsive method of capturing students' experiences in any plans. Many times policies don't take into account students with a whole range of contexts and backgrounds. That human experience beyond the grades is important. What is your experience as a student of whatever racial identity? Does your life matter to and at this institution?

Other essential elements are structures to ensure that the work is done. People write policies, and they must be followed up by questions, like "Where are the resources? What is the report card that Western is going to put out? Which students will benefit

(PHOTO BY ANNIE ROWLAND PHOTOGRAPHY)



ENID LEE

A renowned anti-racism advocate, Enid Lee, BA'74, has been fighting for racial equity for more than 30 years. The consultant, author and international expert on equitable education was celebrated in the 2016 edition of *100 Accomplished Black Canadian Women*, a publication that aims to inspire Black women and girls.

from this?" We know it's not going to be done in one fell swoop and that the change is often not permanent. It must constantly be refurbished. Yes, the climate is less racist, the access is greater, and the hiring reflects the rich racial diversity of humanity and all its talent. It means you are ready for the next level. These are always my words to those who say they want to change systems.

And then there are the students, that invaluable resource that every institution has to draw on – the young people who are there with their fantastic social media. When I think of what we didn't have in the 70s, and what you have now, I think of maximizing these tools for equity, also knowing they can be weaponized and used in the service of racism. Look at how we can make the most of the new tools for bringing humankind together, disseminating ideas, and transforming our world for justice, joy and generosity. It's an exciting time to be alive.

If ever there was a time for facing the truth about our history and its racist roots, that time is now. If ever there was a time for writing a new history with anti-racist policies and practices, that time is also now.

'Progress isn't in a straight line'

Idil Mussa: *You occupy spaces that are known to lack diversity – the NHL and financial services. Tell me about the reception you've received in addressing anti-Black racism or racial equality.*

Chris George: I grew up playing hockey. I've typically been the only Black hockey player on my team, never mind the league. I've been on Bay Street for almost 20 years – 10 at BMO and nine at Scotiabank. Throughout the entire time I've been the only Black guy in my office, so it's certainly been a unique journey. I just got my work done, kept my head down and hit my targets.

But over this last year, it's been a little bit liberating. I'm at a place in my career and life where I now have a voice, connections and the strength to dig deeper, and to use my voice to hopefully help the generation that's coming behind us. There's just so much talent in our community and our allies are starting to understand that diversity is strength. We really need to capture this moment and bring that to the table.

IM: *What was your experience like as a Black hockey player and how did it shape your advocacy around encouraging diversity in a sport that's very, very white?*

CG: Hockey literally is a white sport; it's 97 per cent white and 75 per cent non-American. It's a global sport that is not as connected to the Black American experience, specifically.

Last summer, nine current NHL players started a group called the Hockey Diversity Alliance and I joined them as an advisor. Later that summer, the NBA's Milwaukee Bucks walked out [in protest of the police shooting of Jacob Blake in Wisconsin]. The NHL was slower to respond; it took them a few days to walk out. The Hockey Diversity Alliance was guiding and advising the players on what they should say and how they should act. Again, remember you're guiding all white, mostly non-American players. When they did walk out, I just remember sitting on a Zoom call in my office. It was a very proud moment for us, as we were asked as an authority for help.

I may be optimistic by nature, but I feel like we have this moment where we have the fundamental empathy that's required, we're organized and we have talents. We also have people like Enid [Lee]. We can finally give her the platform, resources and support to execute what she's been working on her whole life.

IM: *Hockey has been undergoing a bit of a racial reckoning, and you've been pivotal in that. The NHL has announced initiatives to combat racism and boost inclusion, but just this past season Edmonton Oilers defenseman Ethan Bear, who's Indigenous, received racist messages on social media following a series-ending loss to the Winnipeg Jets. Are NHL initiatives enough to stamp out this kind of racism?*

CG: Sometimes progress isn't in a straight line. We have to realize we're making certain sectors feel uncomfortable, and they're enabled and empowered on social media in some ways.

I think we have to be stronger than ever as we prepare for this potential backlash, as we've seen recently with the horrific act against Muslims in London [Ont].

I myself experienced racism in London. I was coming home after a game one night and a biker gang came up to me, hurled the N-word at me, knocked me out with brass knuckles and kicked me unconscious. It was an extremely blatant racist act. I was a 20-year-old man at the time. Fortunately, people carried me to the hospital, where I got eight stitches in my head. Looking back at it now as a 45-year-old, I remember feeling almost guilty. It was like I didn't want people to know what had happened. I didn't want to be that Black guy who was getting in trouble. I didn't want to get kicked off the team. At the time, I was happy we were able to keep it quiet and that I didn't get punished. I literally did nothing wrong, except I was Black in the wrong spot.

Right now, as much as you probably pick up a tone from me that I'm optimistic, that we're organized and we have these allies – we still have to realize change is not received well by everyone. We need to be really vigilant with how strong and connected we are. It's a movement, not a moment.

The next leg is going to be more behind-the-scenes, the really hard work. When we're no longer the top news story, that's the real grassroots stuff.

IM: *We know the importance of building Black generational wealth and the doors that it opens. Tell me a little bit about your work in pursuing racial equity in the financial industry.*

CG: I've been on Bay Street for 20 years now. And I've always been the only Black advisor in my office, which, if you pause and think about it, is pretty unbelievable. But I think organically, as our population changes, we are going to inevitably realize that we need someone like myself who can relate and support our communities.

"It's a movement, not a moment."

– Chris George

I'm 45 and I built a valuable business. I do a great job for my clients and I work at a great company. We're not going anywhere, right? And when we're not in the news anymore, we're still going to be in the boardrooms figuring this out. I think that's what's happening now, and I'm optimistic we're laying the foundations for sustainable change.

IM: *In the public and private sector, there hasn't ever really been a problem recruiting Black people. The problem has always been a lack of advancement opportunities, and that they're not occupying decision-making roles. How are you finding boardrooms today? Do you still feel like the only one?*

CG: I am one of the only ones, yes. But the Black North Initiative is certainly a large and very organized group. More than 500 companies have signed a pledge, part of which is about reaching hiring targets. There's more than 300 volunteers like myself... and now we get in the room and help them achieve these targets. We're also deliberately going into the universities and being a part of the process that helps place them. And we're being welcomed into that process. The fruits of our labour will be that next generation. 🍀

(PHOTO BY ALICIA WYNTER PHOTOGRAPHY)



CHRIS GEORGE

A former professional hockey player and NHL draft pick, Chris George, BA'01, was often the only Black player on the team. Now a successful financial professional, he advocates for meaningful change against systemic racism, and is helping to empower Black Canadians through the Hockey Diversity Alliance and the Black North Initiative.



The BlackNorth Initiative: Led by the Canadian Council of Business Leaders Against Anti-Black Systemic Racism, the BlackNorth Initiative (BNI) is on a mission to end anti-Black systemic racism by utilizing a business-first mindset. Western has joined the BNI, with President Alan Shepard representing the university on the education committee.