

From: [McRae, Angela](#)
To:
Subject: FW: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
Date: March 20, 2019 9:52:58 AM

From: Stephanie Bass
Sent: March 19, 2019 9:28 AM
To: clerk@hamilton.ca
Subject: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

To the General Issues Committee;

It's not easy to write about this, because words are an imperfect medium when it comes to the experience of being a black woman in Hamilton. You lose the emotional impact, the gut-deep feelings of fear and anger - that words on a page can't properly relate. So I want you to keep those two words in mind: fear and anger. Fear because of what I've experienced during the course of my life. Anger because people still say 'well at least we're not as bad as the States' or 'something like that could never happen here.'

And anger because even when people agree with me, I have seen little effort to make the needed changes so that these experiences become less frequent— or so that I feel safer and supported if they do.

I have experienced a plethora of race-motivated attacks, verbal and physical. I'd like to give you a few examples for the past 5 years:

- I was harassed by the police at Main and McNab because I had just come out of a movie at Jackson Square with my friends and was heading home. They demanded to see my ID. A white friend came over and asked what was going on. They left me alone after that.
- It happened again. I was with my husband waiting for a bus at Main and Longwood. It was late and he didn't want me waiting alone in an empty parking lot. A police car pulled up. The officer wanted me to give him my ID. But he backed off as soon as my husband, who is white, stepped in and asked him for specifics. Suddenly the policeman said there was no problem anymore.
- On more than one occasion, I was called a ni**** on HSR buses Loudly. I had my seat taken from me. And no one ever did anything. Not the driver. Not the passengers.
- On the street, a man called me a ni**** and threw a milkshake at me.
- A cop pulled me over on Main St because I was driving "too nice a car." The officer wanted to know if it was mine.
- In 2013, I had a brick thrown at my head by a Nazi panhandler at University Plaza because I didn't want to give change to him. I knew he was a Nazi because of the swastika on his jacket.
- On Main street with my husband, a man in a truck screamed 'ni**** lover' at us outside the Wimpy's Diner on Main Street. We don't go there anymore.
- In 2017 I was yelled at in Westdale - called a "terrorist" because it was raining and I had a scarf on my head to keep my hair dry.
- At the Starbucks on Locke Street, I held the door open for an older man. He said

he didn't think monkeys drank coffee.

- This year at my workplace, I had a swastika drawn on the outside of my classroom portable just after my arrival.

This isn't everything I've dealt with. These are just the highlights. So when I say I have experienced racism in Hamilton, please believe me.

Professionally, I'm a historian and an educator. I earned a Master's degree at York University in 2007, and my focus was on how race and gender intersect in policy. I've taught classes "Critical Race Studies," and "Introduction to Feminist Studies" at McMaster University. I've spoken at conferences and organized anti-racism workshops at schools in Hamilton. Currently, I am a teacher for the HWDSB. I am an expert on this subject both in study and in life experience.

Hamilton has held a dubious honour for several years now by being in the top 3 Canadian cities for police-reported hate crimes. In 2016, Hamilton was number one according to Statistics Canada. When I read this, it wasn't too hard for me to believe this because I've seen it first-hand.

We all share a responsibility in dealing with prejudice and racism. It's not enough to condemn what is wrong if you don't do anything about it. Thoughts and words of support are not helpful when there are real consequences for people - when I can't walk down the street without being anxious that someone is going to challenge my right to be there. When I am afraid of being alone in a public place during the daytime, never mind at night. Or when I'm afraid to talk to the police because I've had negative interactions with them before.

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Because racism it is learned and taught, we can also un-learn it in order to change - to grow - to leave the hatefulness behind. But it's not easy. It doesn't self-regulate. It can't be left up to an individual to go out and educate themselves. It's high time we as a society accepted that some of our prejudices are systemic. And the proof they are systemic lies in the simple fact that there are laws against discrimination. We need the Anti-Racism resource Centre, that again has been put on hold this year.

More than that, our community needs a distinct set of anti-racism strategies for the many people of colour in the City of Hamilton. My experiences show that there is real violence and danger for People of Colour here; it affects how I live my life each day— and how I see the city I grew up and currently live in. The city has a moral obligation to serve Hamiltonians of colour by providing some service to support the many experiences of racism that occur on our streets everyday.

This is an action worth investing in. People are always worth investing in.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Bass