

# Standing room only for March 9th discussion of Race, Poverty and Policing in Hamilton



Panelists (from right to left) Kayonne Christy, Yvonne Maracle, and Ian Jarvis

It was a packed house last Wednesday at a panel discussion on the Criminalization of Poverty: Race, Poverty, and Policing in Hamilton. Panelists included Dr. Ameil Joseph from the School of Social Work and co-founder of Hamilton's Anti-Racism Centre, Kayonne Christy, a student from the McMaster Womanists, Yvonne Maracle from the de dwa de dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre, and Ian Jarvis, a Hamilton artist and advocate who has focused on HIV/AIDS, queer, and sex worker activism. Each spoke powerfully about how those who are racialized and live in poverty experience disproportionate targeting and violence by police.

Ameil Joseph opened the event with a discussion of the historical discrimination against racialized and differently abled people in Canada, particularly through immigration policies that barred many from entering the country. He also highlighted how restrictions on immigration, that have always been necessary for Canada's colonial project, have been institutionalized and carried forward into today's social programs. In particular, he showed how welfare 'reform' in the 1990s was sold to the public using the language of 'welfare fraud', demonizing an entire class of people and perpetuating stereotypes. He also showed early examples of racial profiling in Canada that, like many instances today, were technically illegal but justified using stereotypes and racist and classist 'expert ideas'.

Kayonne Christy brought this history to the present by talking about the practice of carding, police checks that collect and store information on people just for being on the street or doing daily activities in a 'high priority' area. She explained that carding disproportionately targets racialized and First Nations people and that the practice continues to be used widely even after the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal called it a clear example of racial profiling and a violation of Human Rights. She challenged the audience to think about the language we use to talk about neighbourhoods, from Landsdale and Beasley in downtown Hamilton to Regent Park in Toronto, because the words we use ("high-priority", "high-crime", "at-risk") are often a mask to justify police violence and surveillance.

Yvonne Maracle and Ian Jarvis spoke about how the policing of poor communities and First Nations people creates distrust and about how the actions of police can often leave

people less safe in their own neighbourhoods. Jarvis also spoke about the importance of smashing the stereotype that poor people are dangerous or can't be trusted. Speaking from his experience organizing with sex workers, he challenged the audience to think about the violence and risks they face from clients and how they can't turn to the police. Similarly, Maracle spoke of the histories of trauma experienced by Aboriginal people, especially from the Residential School system, and how these experiences or memories are triggered and added to with each police encounter. Paraphrasing Angela Davis during the Q&A, Dr. Joseph asked simply: do the police do what they say? Do they protect and serve? And who really gets to be safe in our society?

This discussion comes in the wake of student and staff concerns about the hiring of Former Hamilton Police Chief Glen de Caire as the head of Parking and Security Services at McMaster. De Caire has been a controversial figure in Hamilton, an active supporter of carding and the architect of the Hamilton Action Teams which have been accused of targeting poor, racialized, and indigenous residents in the downtown core. In January, students protested his appointment, with groups like the McMaster Womanists calling for McMaster to live up to its commitments to being an inclusive institution. More information and a student petition to "Get de Caire off campus" can be found [here](#).

This event was organized by the McMaster Community Poverty Initiative with the support of OPIRG McMaster and the President's Advisory Committee on Building an Inclusive Community (PACIBIC).

For more information or to get involved in similar work check out:

Community Coalition Against Racism  
<http://www.ccarhamilton.ca/>

Anti-Racists and Allies of Hamilton <https://www.facebook.com/HamiltonForDiversity/>

McMaster Womanists  
<http://www.facebook.com/MacWomanists>

President's Advisory Committee on Building and Inclusive Community (PACIBIC) [www.pacbic.mcmaster.ca](http://www.pacbic.mcmaster.ca)

