



Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950 (Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History)

Constance Backhouse

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Historically Canadians have considered themselves to be more or less free of racial prejudice. Although this conception has been challenged in recent years, it has not been completely dispelled. In Colour-Coded, Constance Backhouse illustrates the tenacious hold that white supremacy had on our legal system in the first half of this century, and underscores the damaging legacy of inequality that continues today.

Backhouse presents detailed narratives of six court cases, each giving evidence of blatant racism created and enforced through law. The cases focus on Aboriginal, Inuit, Chinese-Canadian, and African-Canadian individuals, taking us from the criminal prosecution of traditional Aboriginal dance to the trial of members of the 'Ku Klux Klan of Kanada.' From thousands of possibilities, Backhouse has selected studies that constitute central moments in the legal history of race in Canada. Her selection also considers a wide range of legal forums, including administrative rulings by municipal councils, criminal trials before police magistrates, and criminal and civil cases heard by the highest courts in the provinces and by the Supreme Court of Canada.

The extensive and detailed documentation presented here leaves no doubt that the Canadian legal system played a dominant role in creating and preserving racial discrimination. A central message of this book is that racism is deeply embedded in Canadian history despite Canada's reputation as a raceless society.

Winner of the Joseph Brant Award, presented by the Ontario Historical Society



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