OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUE

Dr. Miriam Taylor is the director of Publications and Partnerships at the Association for Canadian Studies and the Canadian Institute for Identities and Migration.

This special edition of *Canadian Diversity* in partnership with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO to mark the International Decade for people of African Descent and entitled: *Facing the Change: Canada and the International Decade for People of African Descent*, will be published in two parts. With an introduction by CCUNESCO Vice-President, Mireille Apollon, this first issue is divided into four sections.

The first section, *Facing the Challenges and Opportunities Of The International Decade*, opens with a contribution from the The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, providing an overview of current efforts to eradicate racism and discrimination through a series of National Black Canadians Summits held in the context of the International Decade. The Honourable Jean Augustine then describes the unique opportunities and responsibilities of the International Decade, concluding that the path forward involves "the identification of and global coordination on overarching ideals that consider the 400-plus years of systemic subjugation of rights; and the need to incite a fair, just and equitable global playing field for present and future generations of Black people". Nova Scotia being the first and only province of Canada to proclaim the international decade, Wayn Hamilton, the Chief Executive Officer of the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs, outlines his province's Action Plan, called *Count Us In*. Designed to provide government with specific actions, facilitating collaboration between government departments, organizations and the community, the plan aims to help eliminate the many challenges facing African Nova Scotians.

Section two, *Facing the Legacy of Colonialism*, contains three historical articles that highlight different arenas in which the colonial era's legacy of systemic injustice endures into the present. The authors also demonstrate the vital importance of honest and thorough assessments of our past. In *The Sun Never Sets, The Sun Waits to Rise*, Chuka Ejeckam exposes the structural eurocolonialism that persists throughout the former British empire, including in Canada, where a history of enslavement, racial segregation and marginalization have fueled ongoing disparities. Afua Cooper begins her article with Dalhousie University's historic apology to the Black community in Nova Scotia and then proceeds to outline in disturbing detail the multiple areas of the university and its founders' relationship to slavery and racism, showing how essential this honest investigation has been to subsequent expressions of regret and responsibility, recognition and repair. In *Soirées éthiopiennes*: Blackface Culture in Québec, Dorothy Williams traces the little-known history of blackface culture in Quebec, and its role in mainstreaming negative stereotypes about blacks in popular culture, thus placing high-profile 21st century examples of blackface within a sinister tradition that encouraged racism and prejudice.

Entitled *Facing the Findings*, the third section, highlights the importance of scientific research and data collection in arriving at an accurate understanding of the reality faced by Black Canadians into the 21st century, and in dispelling some widely held myths. Jean-Pierre Corbeil and Hélène Maheux of Statistics Canada help us define and identify people of African Descent in Canada, showing the diversity of iden-

tities and multiplicity of origins within this community, as well as the important issues and challenges that this population faces. Tari Ajadi's article explores current initiatives in Nova Scotia that attempt to reform the health system towards greater health equity, by seeking to assess the persistent inequities in the health system as a pathway towards new ways of designing health policy to better meet the specific realities faced by African Canadians. For her part, Shana Poplack, in *What the African American Diaspora can teach us about Vernacular Black English*, dispels the myth that Vernacular Black English is the result of bad or adulterated English. Through her meticulous linguistic analysis, she traces its origins rather to the language spoken by the British who colonized the United States in the 17th century, language patterns that were retained over time due to relative isolation from mainstream linguistic developments.

Section four, *The Face of Lived Experience*, provides brief descriptions of three studies seeking to get to the root of the lived experiences of black communities in different regions of the country. Focusing on the Greater Toronto area, *The Black Experience Project*, as presented by Wendy Cukier, Mohamed Elmi and Erica Wright, reveals that while the very concept of "Black" needs to be unpacked because it masks significant within-group differences, the shared experience of Black identity continues to be defined by institutional and individual racism at many levels. With Vancouver as their area of study, Rebecca Aiyesa and Oleksander (Sasha) Kondrashov, challenge racism through asset mapping and case studies, bringing to light the negative impact of experienced oppression on all aspects of life, both personal and professional. In *Migration, Identity and Oppression*, Christine Lwanga, Oluwasegun Hassan and Christine van de Merwe explore the lived experiences of oppression based on "race," gender and religious differences in family, community, and work settings, and expose the related health, social and economic costs.