



Worlds Within African Ancestry Dialogue

II

March 5, 2022

Alice Mũrage

African Ancestry Project

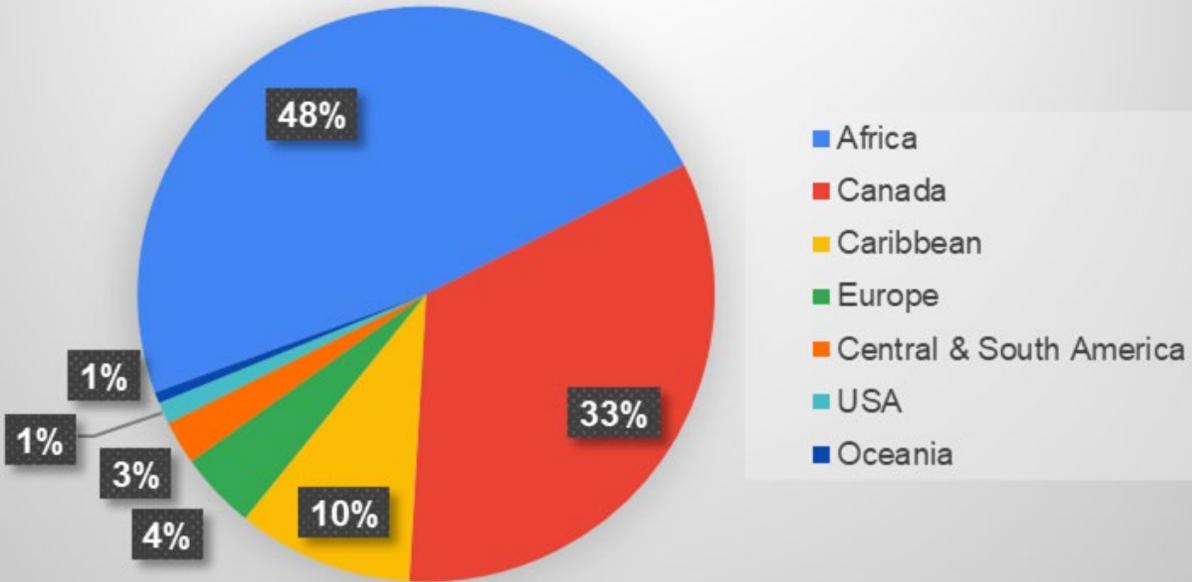


African Ancestry Project: about

- BC Black History Awareness Society
- Community research and dialogue project
- Bringing awareness to the diversity of Black people of African ancestry in British Columbia
- Why?
- Project engagement

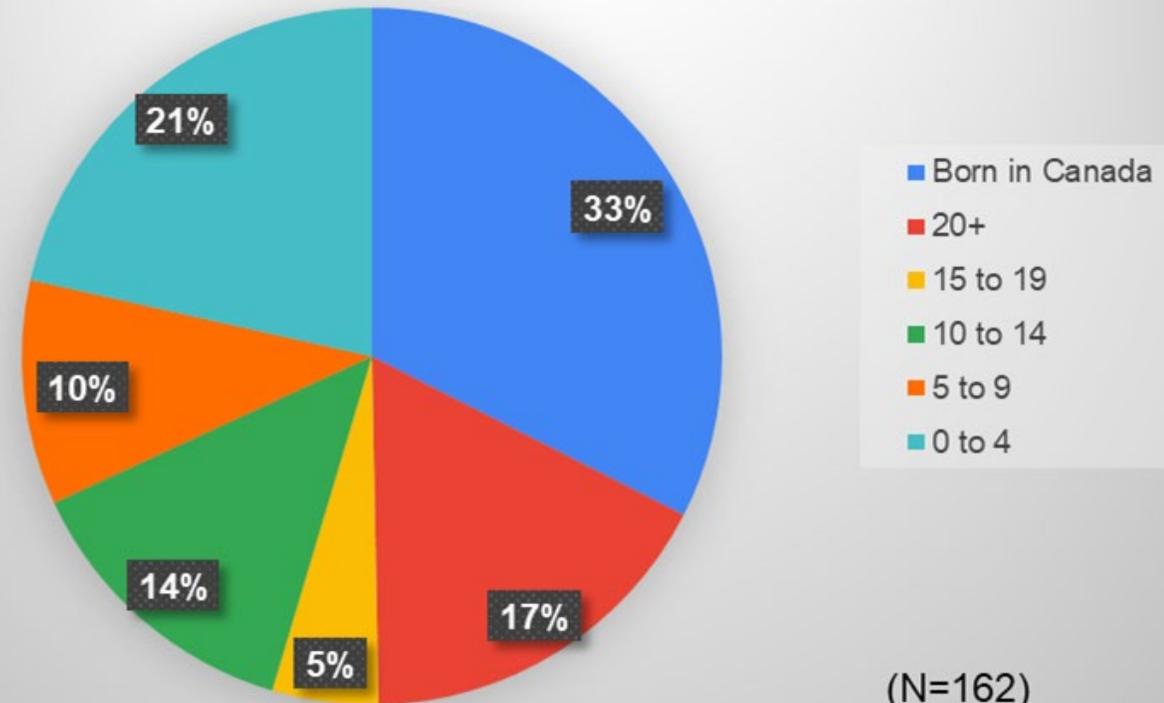
African Ancestry Project participants

Birth, by continent



(N=162)

Years Lived in Canada



(N=162)



Worlds Within Report

- Acknowledgement of Context
- Foreword- Dr. Yabome Gilpin-Jackson
- Preface & Introduction
- Chapter 1: Diverse Histories
- Chapter 2: Diverse Identities
- Chapter 3: Diverse Experiences
- Conclusion- summary, community review reflections, and recommendations



Diverse Histories

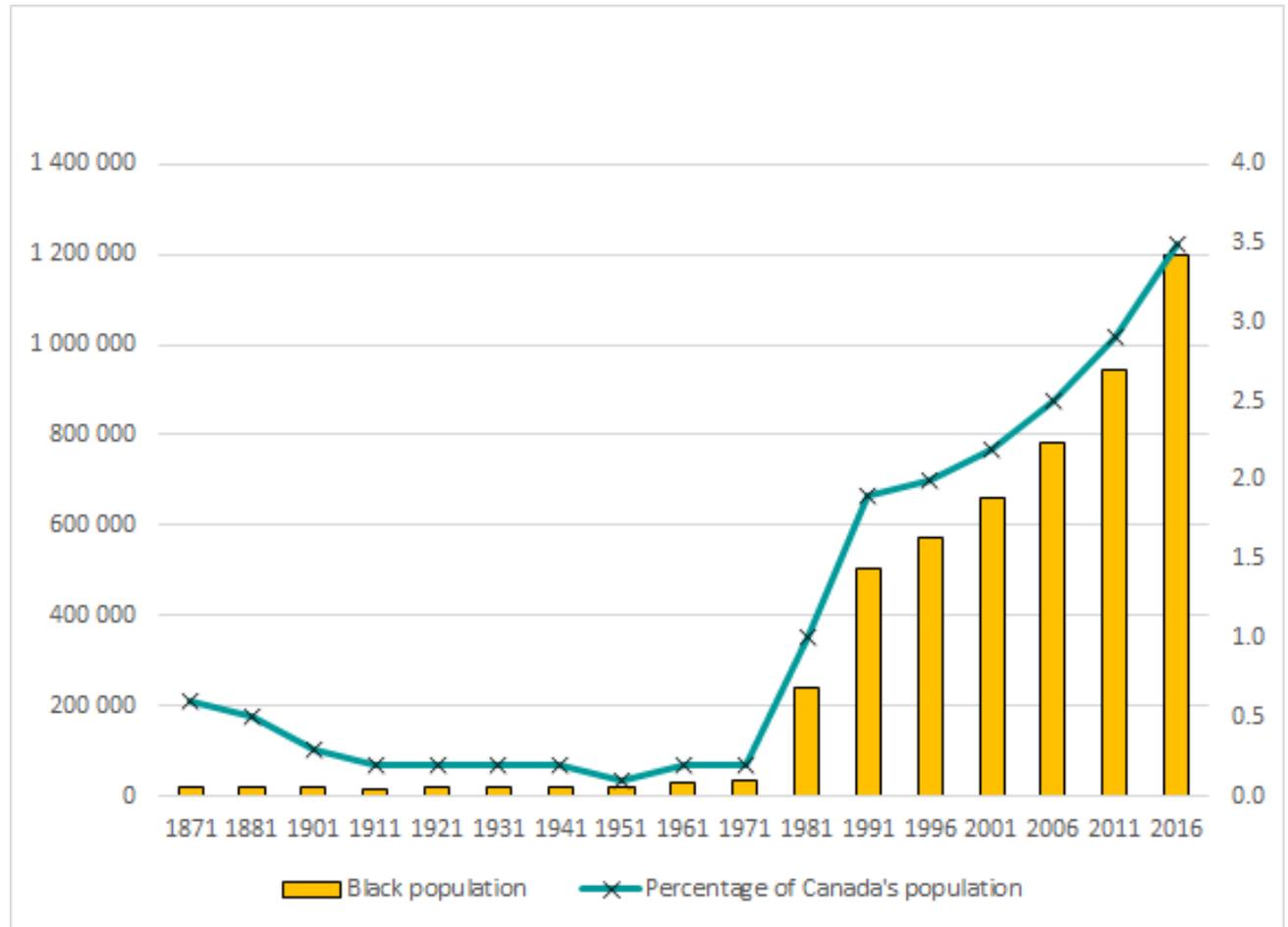
African Ancestry: ancient empires, kingdoms, and chiefdoms

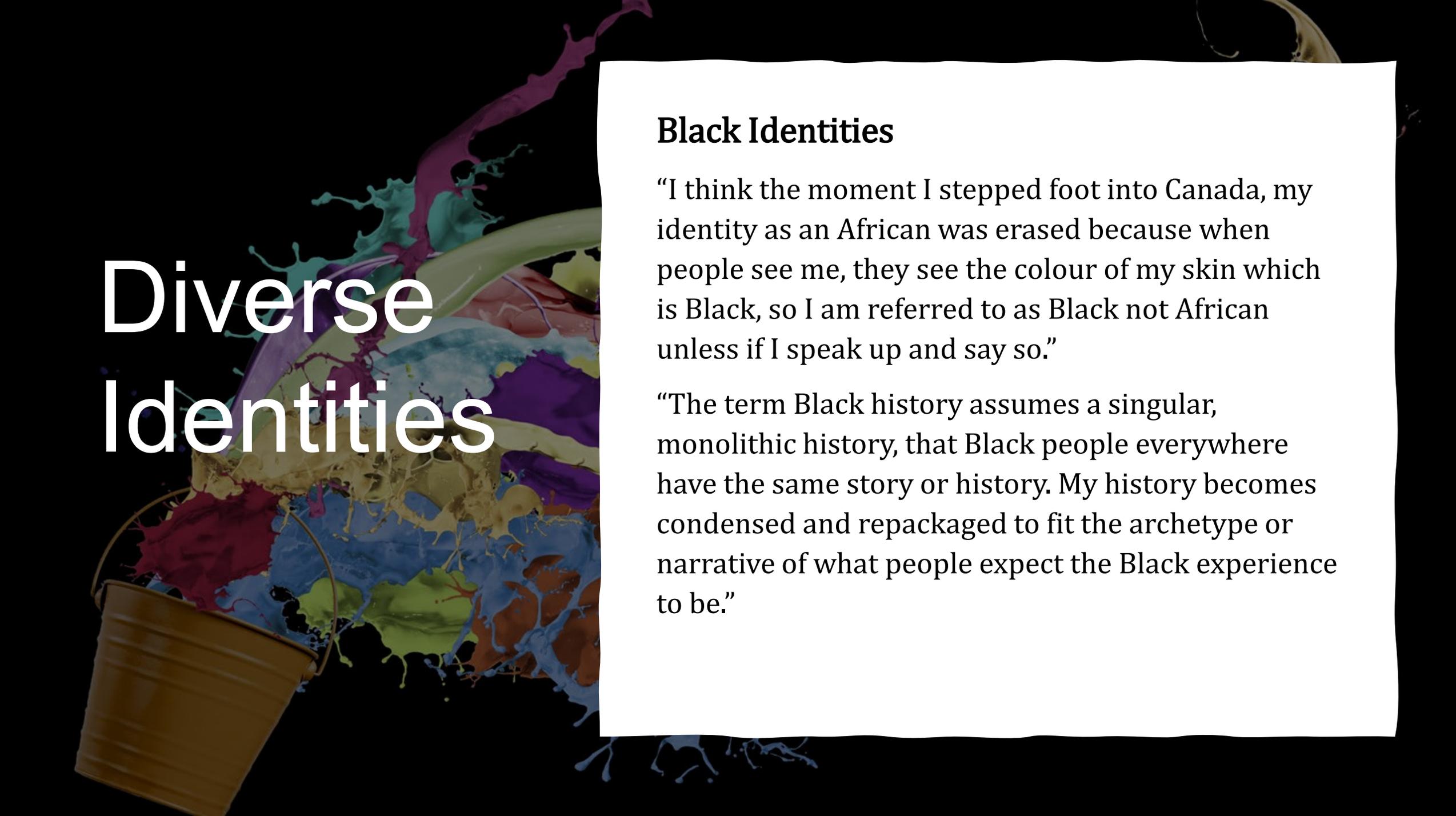
Pathways from Africa to Canada:

- Enslavement in Canada, from 1600s
- Black loyalists, 1780s
- Jamaican Maroons, 1796
- Underground railway, from 1800s
- BC Black Pioneers, 1850s
- Seeking refuge from Jim Crow Laws, early 1900s
- New wave of migration, from late 1960s

Diverse Histories

Black population in Canada, 1871-2016



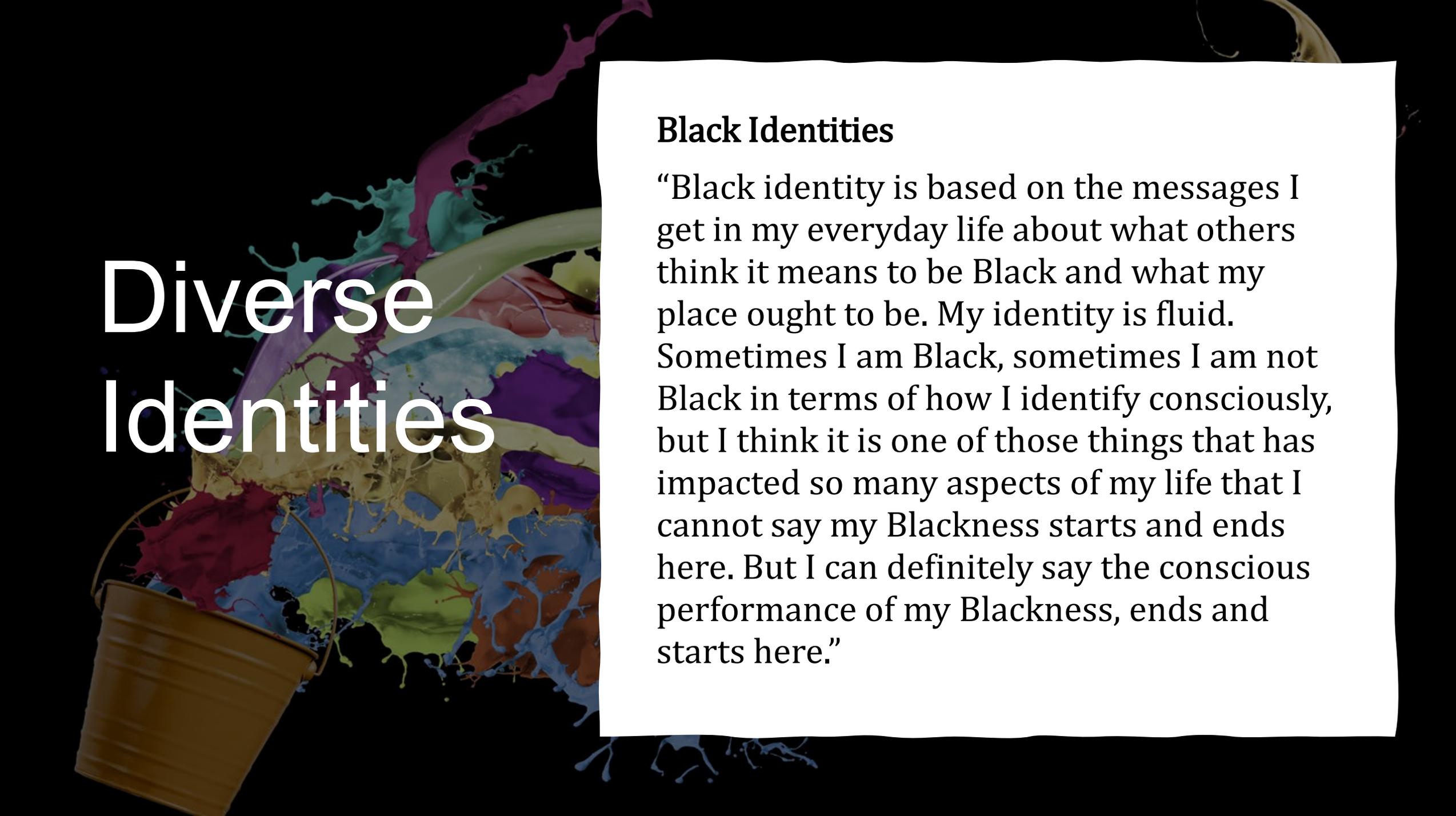


Diverse Identities

Black Identities

“I think the moment I stepped foot into Canada, my identity as an African was erased because when people see me, they see the colour of my skin which is Black, so I am referred to as Black not African unless if I speak up and say so.”

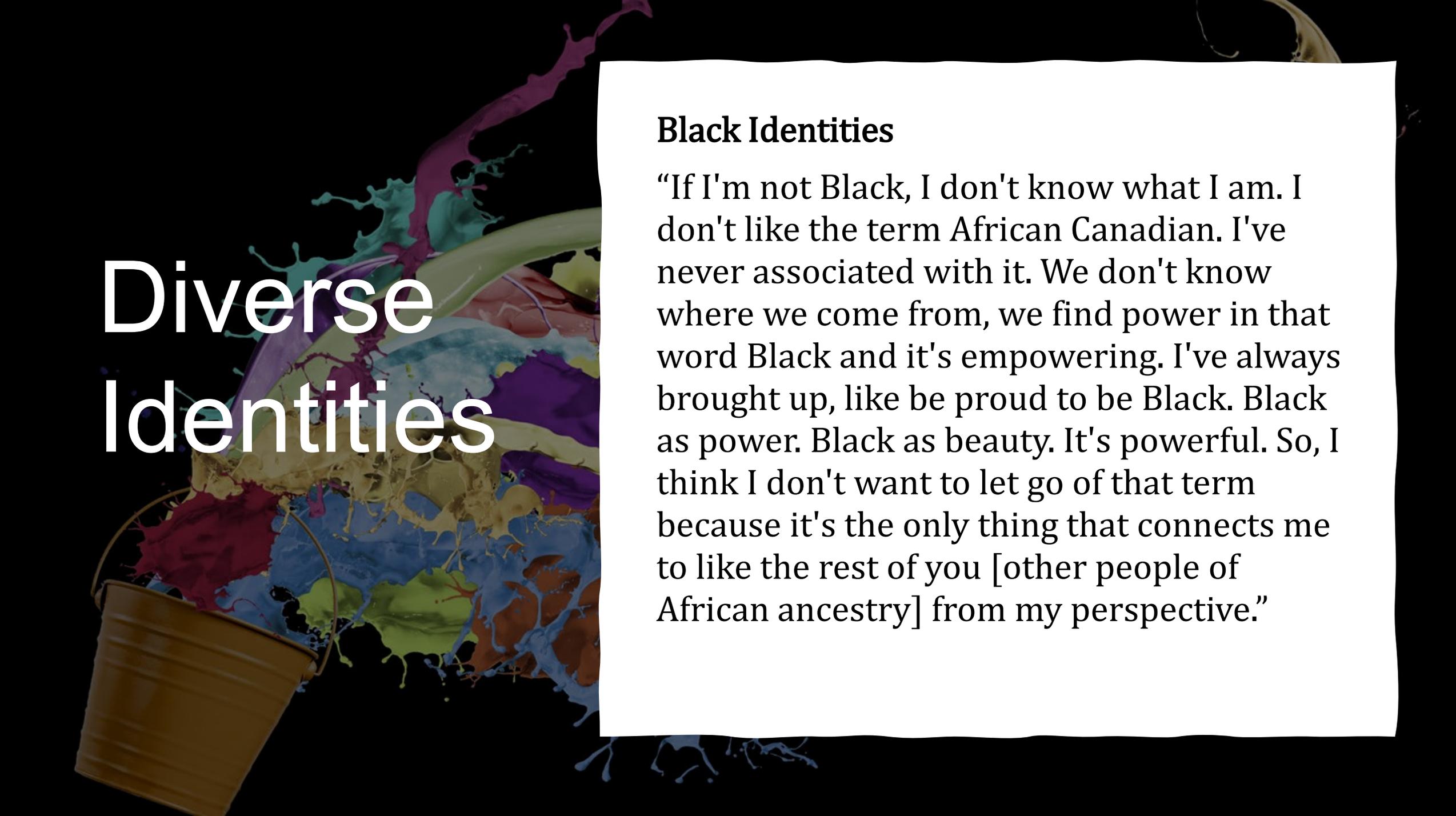
“The term Black history assumes a singular, monolithic history, that Black people everywhere have the same story or history. My history becomes condensed and repackaged to fit the archetype or narrative of what people expect the Black experience to be.”



Diverse Identities

Black Identities

“Black identity is based on the messages I get in my everyday life about what others think it means to be Black and what my place ought to be. My identity is fluid. Sometimes I am Black, sometimes I am not Black in terms of how I identify consciously, but I think it is one of those things that has impacted so many aspects of my life that I cannot say my Blackness starts and ends here. But I can definitely say the conscious performance of my Blackness, ends and starts here.”



Diverse Identities

Black Identities

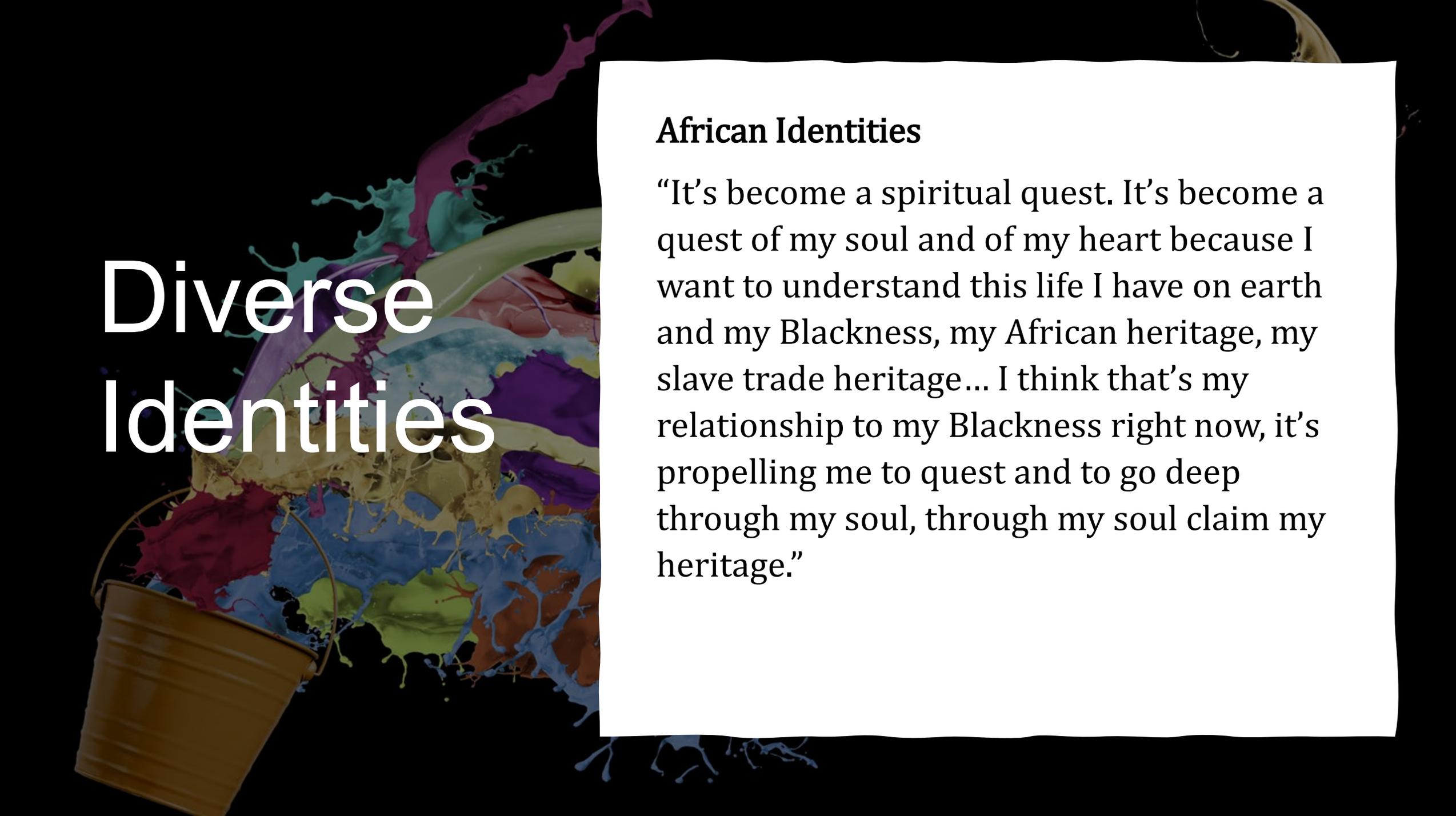
“If I'm not Black, I don't know what I am. I don't like the term African Canadian. I've never associated with it. We don't know where we come from, we find power in that word Black and it's empowering. I've always brought up, like be proud to be Black. Black as power. Black as beauty. It's powerful. So, I think I don't want to let go of that term because it's the only thing that connects me to like the rest of you [other people of African ancestry] from my perspective.”



Diverse Identities

African Identities

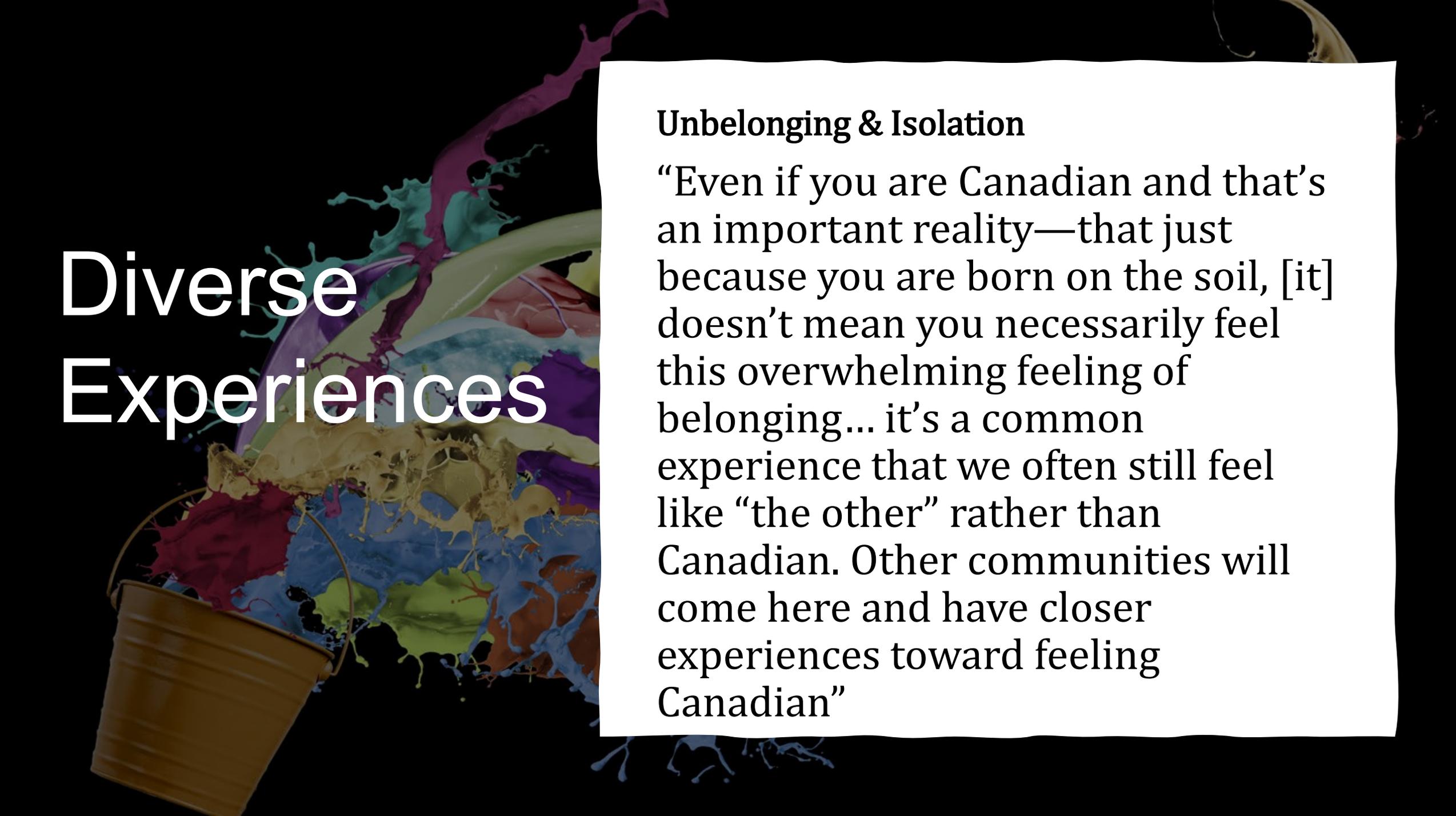
“It feels like I left it (Kenya) a few years ago and now I am here, but this is really not my permanent home even though I have immersed myself in that (Canadian) culture. I am living here, playing here, working here, and schooling here so I am contributing to the Canadian society, yet I am not fully Canadian, either by citizenship. When I go home it’s like well, so many things have happened since you left. So, it’s almost like being in a limbo.”



Diverse Identities

African Identities

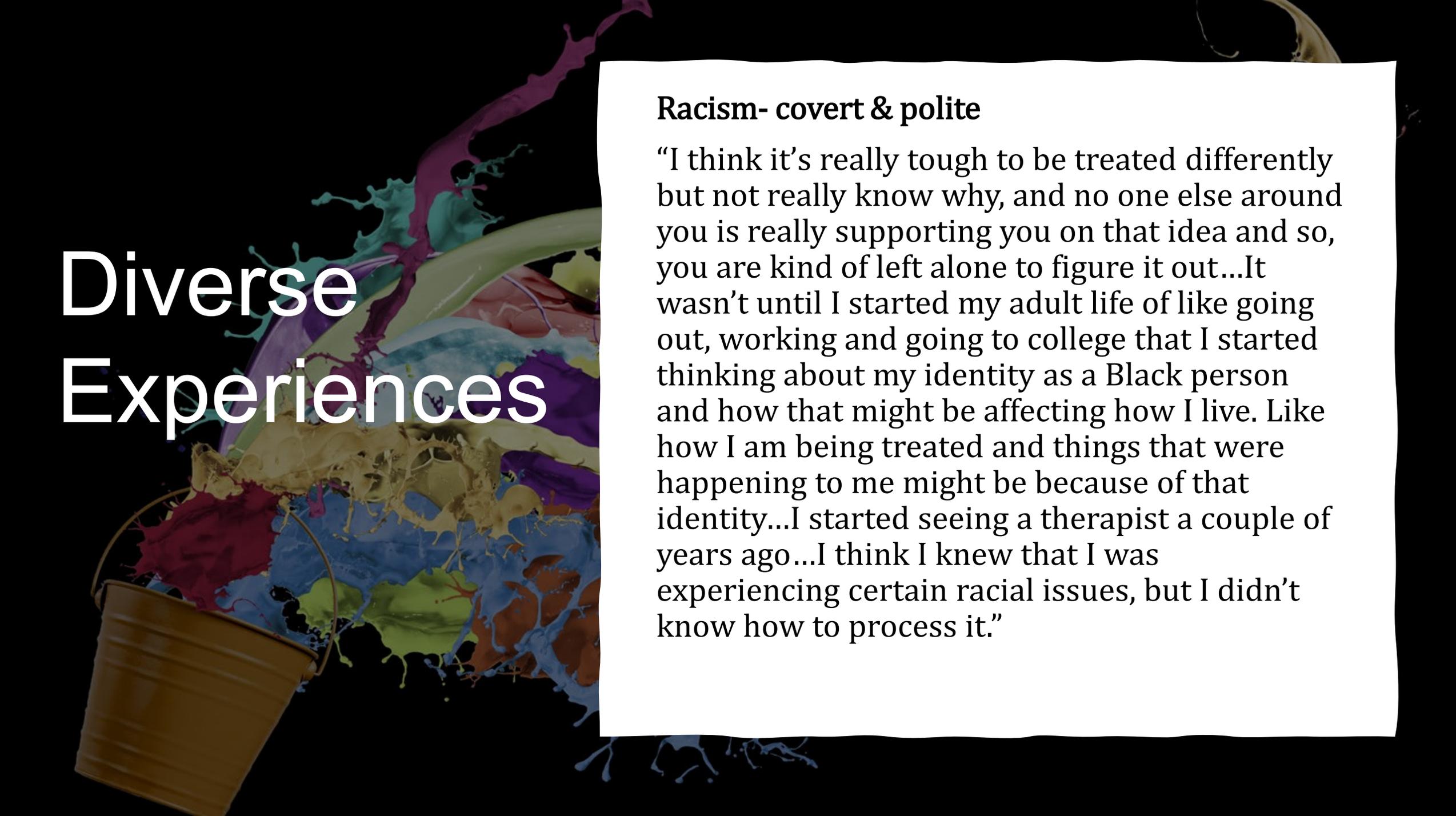
“It’s become a spiritual quest. It’s become a quest of my soul and of my heart because I want to understand this life I have on earth and my Blackness, my African heritage, my slave trade heritage... I think that’s my relationship to my Blackness right now, it’s propelling me to quest and to go deep through my soul, through my soul claim my heritage.”

A bucket of paint is shown in the bottom left corner, tilted and splashing a variety of colors including red, blue, green, yellow, and purple against a black background. The paint splatters are dynamic and spread across the left side of the image.

Diverse Experiences

Unbelonging & Isolation

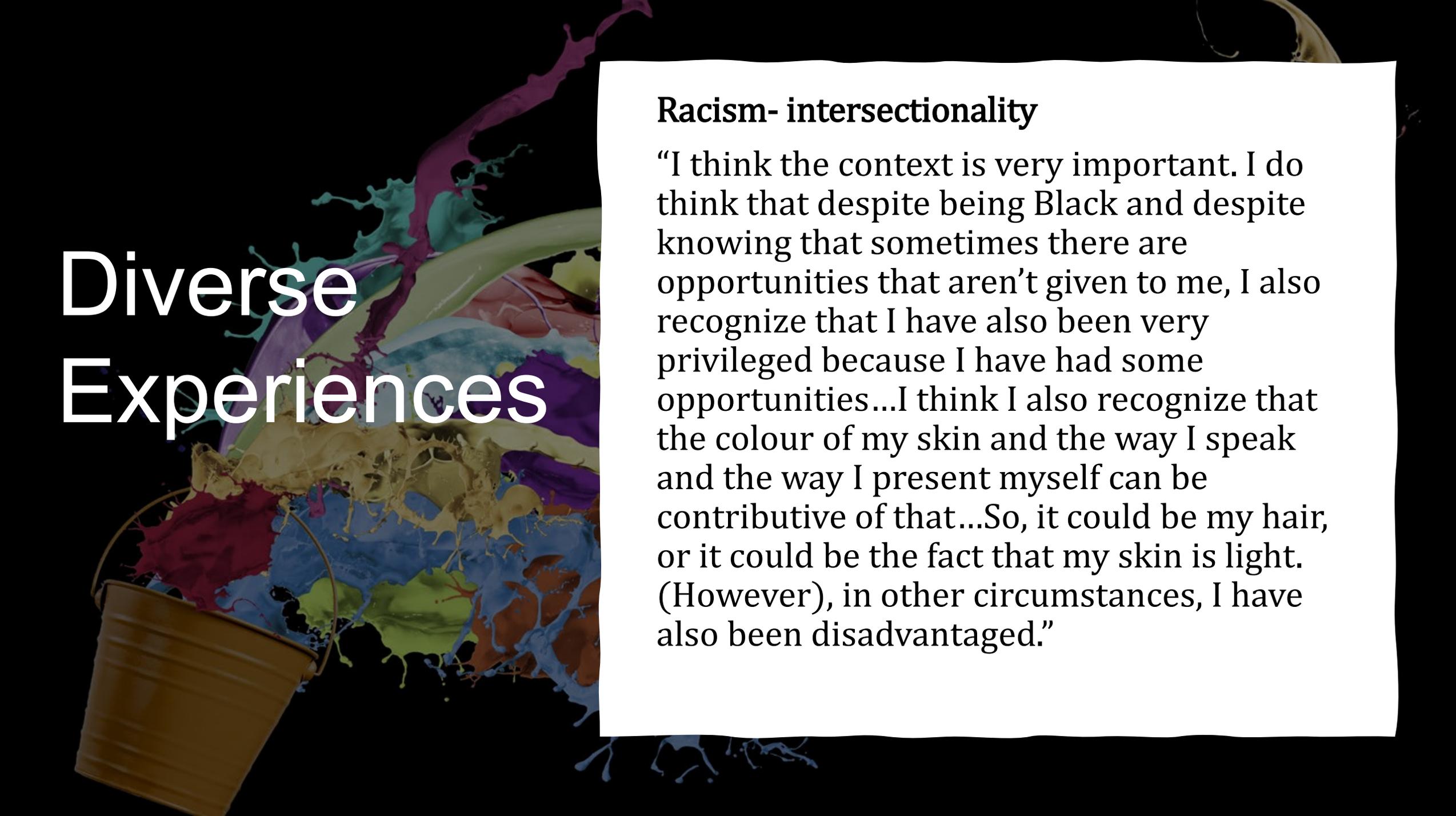
“Even if you are Canadian and that’s an important reality—that just because you are born on the soil, [it] doesn’t mean you necessarily feel this overwhelming feeling of belonging... it’s a common experience that we often still feel like “the other” rather than Canadian. Other communities will come here and have closer experiences toward feeling Canadian”

A bucket of paint is shown in the bottom left corner, tilted and splashing a variety of colors including red, blue, green, yellow, and purple onto a black background. The paint splatters are dynamic and spread across the left and center of the image.

Diverse Experiences

Racism- covert & polite

“I think it’s really tough to be treated differently but not really know why, and no one else around you is really supporting you on that idea and so, you are kind of left alone to figure it out...It wasn’t until I started my adult life of like going out, working and going to college that I started thinking about my identity as a Black person and how that might be affecting how I live. Like how I am being treated and things that were happening to me might be because of that identity...I started seeing a therapist a couple of years ago...I think I knew that I was experiencing certain racial issues, but I didn’t know how to process it.”

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Diverse Experiences

Racism- intersectionality

“I think the context is very important. I do think that despite being Black and despite knowing that sometimes there are opportunities that aren’t given to me, I also recognize that I have also been very privileged because I have had some opportunities...I think I also recognize that the colour of my skin and the way I speak and the way I present myself can be contributive of that...So, it could be my hair, or it could be the fact that my skin is light. (However), in other circumstances, I have also been disadvantaged.”



Diverse Experiences

Racism- impacts

“Still to think [to this] day being worried in Vancouver about his safety and security. That sucks...I just don't see those experiences just with my son, I see it with my sister's adult children and their children as well. Like my grand-niece just turned fourteen and I am consciously aware of it. So, having that discussion again the other day i.e., “you get arrested, where do you keep your hand?” and running through these drills with some hope that that will keep him safer, not “safe” but “safer.” Not everybody does that.”



Diverse Experiences

Carving out space: community & belonging

“To be a refugee always [means] to start new life. To start a new life, it is very hard anyways. When I came to Canada, I got a job in three days. So, directly I had to start, and we had family here, family like a Pentecostal church. With one another we [share] everything. So, it was not hard to resettle life here. Community is powerful.”

“What allows people to be unapologetically Black is when in their space there are normally a lot of Black people, but also infrastructure like cultural centres, businesses, organizations also owned and led by Black people and that serve Black people, schools and all that stuff, but also the presence of Black folks in high spaces, in different ranks who in their own way legitimize



Recommendations

1. Appreciating the diversity of people around you
2. Engaging in dialogue
3. Asking the question 'where are you from?'
4. Raising anti-racist children
5. Teaching and practicing anti-racism in schools
6. Addressing systemic racism
7. Practicing equity in the workplace
8. Considering prior recommendations & engaging communities
9. Building vibrant Black communities

Worlds Within

Diverse Histories, Identities, and Experiences of
Black People of African Ancestry in
British Columbia

Reflections from five Community Reviewers

"It shows the complexities - the nuances we bring. That we're not a [monolith]. We all beautifully just embody these different cultures and complexities."

"I felt heard. To see how beautifully, and how carefully the stories were weaved and honored, and reflected. It just really made me choke and cry."

"I didn't know that I needed it. I feel like for the first time, I'm not reading Black history from a white man's perspective. It filled my heart with joy."

"I saw myself in a lot of these stories. And I saw a lot of absence in my story as well. Being so disconnected from the countries of Africa. So, I spent a lot of time grieving. And I think it's really important to grieve, to let myself settle into it, and to then [move] forward."

"I didn't feel alone anymore because there were so many times that I just shouted, 'me too! me too! yes! this! that!'. I feel isolated, and I don't necessarily know the few [Black] people that I see. And I'm always so curious to learn a bit more. I think that was the biggest thing for me - that connection that I felt. It's a gift."

Alice Mũthoni Mũrage
African Ancestry Project

Alice Mũthoni Mũrage is a social and policy researcher and an immigrant from Kenya, who resides in the unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples.





Thank you!

Comments &
Questions are
welcome 😊