

RAISING AWARENESS ON THE AIRWAVES



**IS THIS FOR REAL?
GIVES A VOICE TO
BLACK EDMONTONIANS >**

BY AVRY LEWIS-MCDOUGALL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ESTA BEE PHOTOGRAPHY

OUMAR SALIFOU AT
THE WALTERDALE BRIDGE

The Edmonton podcasting community is incredibly rich, with shows covering topics ranging from sports to music, but not as many are as raw and as vocal on important issues, matters relating to the Black communities of the city.

Is This For Real? is a podcast that looks at living in Edmonton as members of Black communities and the topics that affect them.

In its first season, the show tackles the topics of policing and anti-Black racism. Co-hosts Oumar Salifou and Hannan Mohamud, as well as contributors Bashir Mohamed, Avnish Nanda and producer Nicholas Yee, present each episode in a one-hour, open-conversation format.

The show debuted this summer after a number of recent deaths of Black people in the United States and Canada, and the protests following them on both sides of the border. It was paramount to launch a platform to give these stories a wider audience.

“I would say that Bashir and Avnish really had the vision to understand that people need to hear these stories and that now is that time. I think after seeing George Floyd happen, after seeing Breonna Taylor, after seeing things in Toronto, obviously having a long history of racism and anti-Black policing in Canada and America, it was about time something like this happened,” says Salifou.

The episodes go in-depth into matters such

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as Jean-Claude Rukundo allegedly being pinned down by officers on the scene after his wife, Sifa Ngeze, was involved in a traffic accident in 2018, to the controversy surrounding Edmonton’s school resource officer program. Rukundo is currently suing officers Pierre Lemire and Owen Staudinger, as well as Edmonton Police Service Chief Dale McFee, for \$650,000.

Policing was one of the themes of the season. It’s tough to picture defunding or abolishing the police right now, with it being the highest budgeted item for the City of Edmonton. But, to Salifou, if that changed, the idea could be in play in the future.

“I think it’s possible; I think that’s what advocates of police abolitionists speak of. I think they speak of the possibility of living in a world without the police. I think if defunding the police is on the table, it’s a step in the right direction that prevents abuse of power or any kind of negative consequences from policing.”

One of the episodes also looks at how Salifou and Mohamed grew

up in the city's northside, attended Dickinsfield School and saw how it developed their relationship with law enforcement. The segments addressing these topics can be quite raw and it's been a line that the team at *Is This For Real?* has tried to balance when getting into these stories.

"There's a lot of pain in the Black community, because people here have [experienced racism] for quite some time. I think what's coming across is the pain and the sadness," says Salifou.

Another one of the topics addressed hit close to home for Salifou: Canadian media's relationship with the police and the status of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) journalists at major networks.

As a journalist whose work has appeared on CBC and CJSR FM, Salifou has looked at the use of language by reporters and outlets that can portray to a listener, reader or viewer a reason to look down on a Black person in a story.

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"Society is going to view Black people negatively if you're constantly perpetuating negative stereotypes in the media. That's the consequence of publishing unthoughtful news stories."

To Salifou, white reporters who are called out should reflect, so they can change the perspectives of their stories.

"If someone calls you racist, that doesn't mean that's a death sentence. That means you should reconsider your actions and try to be more inclusive. I think that should be the reaction. People get scared when you accuse them of racism, but I think ultimately what's necessary and what's needed is to change how Black people are covered in the media."

For the future of the show, the *Is This For Real?* team will chat with members of Black communities to see what they'd like to see addressed. Some of the ideas for future seasons include covering health care, the financial industry and education.

Edmonton Community Foundation is providing funding for *Is This For Real?* to hire an editor and expand the show from its current podcast format, and also to give Black journalists a space to be able to tell stories that impact their communities.

"It's always good to give back, I think that's the biggest thing," Salifou says, "I didn't necessarily have a lot of people that I looked up to when I was doing journalism; being able to be that person for someone else is really meaningful." ■

