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What does it mean to be Brown in Canada?

Al-Solaylee set to spark conversation at Wednesday's Lit On Tour Aurora

What does it mean to be ?brown? in Canada?
Being on the ?cusp of whiteness and the edge of blackness? is an issue Canadian journalist Kamal Al-Solaylee has considered since he was a child, and one he was able to explore in-depth in his critically acclaimed and award-winning book Brown: What Being Brown in the World Today Means (To Everyone).
First published in 2016, the issues explored within its pages remain as timely as ever and the themes will be explored deeper next week at the Aurora Public Library in a community conversation.
Toronto International Festival of Authors presents Mr. Al-Solaylee in their second Lit On Tour Aurora event, which will take place at APL next Wednesday, October 10 at 7 p.m., in a talk led by Brock Weir, editor of The Auroran.
?A daring and politically resonant work, Brown challenges assumptions about race, immigration and globalism and recounts the heartbreaking stories of people caught in the middle,? says APL on the book, which a finalist in the Governor General's Literary Awards, and a Globe & Mail, National Post, Toronto Life, Walrus, CBC Books, and Chatelaine Book of the Year.
Mr. Solaylee says he first began thinking about exploring this topic in greater depth in 2012, long before the rise of Donald Trump in the United States and the impact of Brexit across the Atlantic. His first step was to look at the issue of being Brown from the concept of labour.
?I wanted to talk about this idea of Brown people kind of being the world's working class at the moment,? he says. ?I had no other format to do this; I'm not a filmmaker, I'm not a singer, I'm not a playwright, and the only way I can do it as a journalist in a reported way. It sounds callous, but I didn't think history would be in my side, in a way. As I was reporting it, and as I was finishing it, both Trump and Brexit happened and that gave the book a kind of immediacy.?
Neither of those world-changing events came as a surprise to him; Brown people, he says, have seen the ?writing on the wall? for years, but they each forced everyone ? regardless of skin colour ? to ?confront what has been bubbling under the surface.?
These issues have come into sharper focus in the last year, he says, with the rise of right-wing politics and anti-immigration platforms offered by politicians at home and abroad.
?There's no form of nationalism without xenophobia,? he says, citing the final chapter of the book which focuses on the 2015 Federal Election with then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper framing issues from the perspective of ?Old Stock? versus ?New Stock? Canadians. ?That was a polite way of saying ?whites' and ?non-whites.'?
?A lot of people,? he says, are seeing politicians like Doug Ford and Maxime Bernier ?following in the footsteps of Trump,? but Mr. Solaylee argues that President Trump is following in the footsteps of Ford Nation with populism and the ?simplification of the message? and ?folksiness.?
?I would like Canadians to know we're actually kind of complicit in what's going on,? he says. ?We have the prototype for using race as a kind of race baiting. I want them to have a better awareness of the politics around us and they begin to engage. The idea that people don't see race is a complete fallacy to me. Even well-meaning people need to stop saying that. Of course you see race. What matters is how you act on it. My goal is to make people more political and more engaged.?

To become engaged and pose your questions of Kamal Al-Solaylee, come out to the Aurora Public Library on Wednesday, October 10 for Lit On Tour Aurora. Free tickets are still available from aurorapl.ca and copies of Brown will be available to purchase on site courtesy of Blue Heron Books.