

# BLACK LIVES MATTER -TORONTO

Tracing its origins, goals, and victories

## SEPTEMBER 24, 2014

Jermaine Carby was killed in Brampton, Ontario by police officer Ryan Reid, shortly after the death of Michael Brown in the U.S. The Canadian media only covered the death of Brown. In response, Black Lives Matter activists organized a vigil in Toronto which was attended by over 3,000 people. Afterwards, they were invited to join the Black Lives Matter international organization. Black Lives Matter International is a continuation of a long tradition of Black resistance against white supremacy and anti-Black Racism.

## WHAT IS ANTI-BLACK RACISM?

In the Canadian context, anti-Black racism is the violent colonial absenting of Blackness and Black degradation within an oppressive white supremacist system. White supremacy is a belief system that assumes the moral and racial superiority of those deemed to be white. Anti-Black racism can be seen in Canada's violent history of enslavement, displacement, and segregation of Black people. Today, we see its continuation in institutions like the police and criminal justice system.

## BLMTO VISION

- To be a platform upon which Black communities across Toronto can actively dismantle all forms of anti-Black racism, liberate Blackness, support Black healing, and build a Black, liberated future.

## MISSION

- To forge critical connections and work in solidarity with Black communities, solidarity movements, and allies in order to dismantle all forms of state-sanctioned violence against African, Caribbean, and Black cis, queer, trans, and disabled populations in Toronto. Acknowledges the violence of colonization on Black and Indigenous people, and demands reparations and decolonization.

## ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

- Composed of a steering committee with varied experiences of Blackness. Operate with the principle of "all of us, or none of us."
- Seek to build power directly from communities so that they may advocate for themselves
- Intergenerational, guided by elders.
- Prioritize community-focused care. Do so using a spiral model of organizing that constantly rotates who is being cared for at the centre of the spiral and who is in the tendrils, to help prevent burnout and ensure everyone is taken care of.
- Rotate media representatives to avoid creating a singular target and to amplify a variety of voices

## KEY VICTORIES

### #BLMTO TentCity Occupation



A five day encampment in front of Toronto police headquarters that demanded an overhaul of the city's Special Investigations Unit. The camp offered services such as childcare and education, providing a radical vision for what community care could look like.

"We became a family organized by Black and Indigenous solidarity, feeding, clothing, and sheltering all who came to the space. Tent city was a hub of political education, self care, Black art, childcare, and entertainment. We were a community who truly took care of one another...These examples of community building are arguably our most important victories, because once the power of community building is felt, it cannot be unfelt." - Sandra Hudson and Yusra Khogali, BLMTO activists

### Toronto Pride



The Toronto Pride parade had become a corporatized space where the police had significant visibility, despite a long history of violence against trans and queer communities. In 2016, BLMTO was declared Pride Toronto's "honoured group," despite funding cuts to Blackorama, a Black Pride event. In response to these and other concerns, BLMTO blocked an intersection during the parade and refused to move until their demands were met. Their demands were all agreed to, including prohibiting police from marching in the parade.

### Anti-racism in popular discourse & policy



Before 2014, popular discourse regarding anti-Black racism in Canada did not exist. White culture had accepted the nation-building narrative of Canada's racial tolerance, despite a history of enslavement, segregation, displacement, and exploitation. Today, thanks in large part to the efforts of BLMTO, the popular discourse has shifted. This has precipitated people to demand change from politicians, and BLMTO has been able to secure numerous policy commitments from those in power.



*"We have, at times, been overwhelmed by what we have accomplished. Our work has been a site of critical interventions from the academy to the streets...These are important moments in the journey towards victory, but they are not the victory itself. The victories from power will come from below; from struggle in our communities. They will never be gifted from the benevolence of the white supremacist power structures above us." - Sandra Hudson and Yusra Khogali, BLMTO activists*



Sources:

Hudson, Sandra and Yusra Khogali. "We will Win: Black Lives Matter – Toronto." In Race and Racialization: Essential Reading, 2nd edition, edited by Tania Das Gupta, Carl E. James, Chris Andersen, Grace-Edward Galabuzi & Roger C. A. Maak, 695-713. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2018.