

WE WILL WIN: BLACK LIVES MATTER - TORONTO

A factsheet by Tanesha Bhangu

This factsheet distills Sandra Hudson and Yusra Khogali's chapter "We Will Win: Black Lives Matter-Toronto" in *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings*. Hudson and Khogali reflect on their activism against anti-Black racism in Toronto and the broader fight against racism in North America. They argue that the institution of slavery and its presence today as anti-Black racism is an integral feature of settler colonialism which exists in policing and the criminal justice system.

Black Lives Matter

As an international organization, Black Lives Matter is a manifestation of the abolitionist movement and continues Black resistance by drawing attention to anti-Black racism and white supremacy. Founded by Opal Tometi and Patrisse Khan-Cullors after the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012, Black Lives Matter has gained prominence by organizing demonstrations against anti-Blackness and challenging police violence.



Canadianart: The Black Lives Matter Toronto Photographer That Made It to Shondaland.
<https://canadianart.ca/features/black-lives-matter-toronto-photograph-made-shondaland/>

National Myth-Making

Hudson and Khogali argue that Canada's national myth-making ignores Black degradation under Canadian colonization. As a result, incidents of Black individuals killed by police in Canada are not covered by news media in the same way as the United States. This indicates that Canadian news media is complicit in the false vision of Canada as tolerant, multicultural, and racism-free.

Mobilizing Power

Black Lives Matter-Toronto mobilizes the Toronto community against anti-Blackness. By using an intersectional lens in their work, the organization recognizes the pluralities of Blackness. It shares histories of oppression, racism, and resistance in Canada and aims to give the liberatory power of transgressive knowledge back to Black communities.

Publicizing Struggle

Publicizing struggles is a deliberate act of rebellion. By reclaiming public spaces, such as the busy streets of downtown, Black Lives Matter-Toronto interrupts the capitalist order of white supremacist society to present struggle for what it is.

Action for Eric Garner

On December 13, 2014 in downtown Toronto, thousands of protestors performed a die-in after police killed Eric Garner. Black Lives Matter-Toronto sent a list of demands to the Toronto City Council to address anti-Black violence and encouraged others to participate through social media.

Black Lives Matter-Toronto

In 2014, 18-year-old Jermaine Carby was killed by police officer Ryan Reid in Brampton, Ontario. A month prior, Michael Brown was also killed by police in the United States, which sparked protests because of media attention. Yet Carby's case was ignored by Canadian mass media. Following this, the Black Lives Matter movement began in Toronto. Black Lives Matter-Toronto highlights the violence of colonization and its impact on Black and Indigenous peoples. It focuses on Black unity against white supremacist colonial borders and demands justice, dignity, and liberation for all Black lives. Its mission is to work in solidarity with Black communities, Black-centric networks, solidarity movements, and allies to dismantle state-sanctioned oppression, violence, and brutality. Black Lives Matter-Toronto is part of the international Black Lives Matter network.

Community Power

Black Lives Matter-Toronto builds power directly from their community. They are not a representative group, but a network, creating spaces for communities to advocate for themselves. Black Lives Matter-Toronto prioritizes collectivity in a society that privileges individuality. They follow a community model of care by constantly rotating front-line shifts to avoid the burnout many activists experience.

Allen Road Shutdown

In 2014, Andrew Loku, a South Sudanese immigrant and father of five, was murdered by police. His family was still in Sudan, and they had planned to migrate to Canada in the future. Black Lives Matter-Toronto began a vigil at Eglinton Gilbert Parkette which was near the apartment he was murdered. Protestors also shut down Allen Road, a major artery highway in Toronto, in front of the police station. Mass media and Toronto Mayor John Tory arrived to the scene. Tory was forced to speak in a public forum and answer questions from Black Lives Matter-Toronto after he avoided them for a year.

Black Liberation Collective

In 2015, Black Liberation Collective emerged as a Black-student-led organization with its mission to transform postsecondary institutions with the same principles as Black Lives Matter. Their mission is to spread awareness of anti-Black racism. As a result, the University of Toronto became the first Canadian university committed to collecting disaggregated race-based data on students, faculty, and staff.

BLM Interruption

In 2016, Black Lives Matter-Toronto visited Toronto Mayor John Tory to interrupt a “celebration” for Black History Month. Tory had ignored the organization’s demand for a public meeting. The Council also increased its budget for police services, and Black Lives Matter-Toronto pointed this out. As a result, this matter was brought to public attention, which otherwise would not have happened.

#BLMTOTentCity

After pitching tents, which bore the names of community members killed by the police and names of Black spaces absented through manifestations of anti-Blackness, protestors were brutalized by the police. This violence was filmed and widely publicized with #BLMTOTentCity used across social media platforms. This space became a hub for political education, self-care, Black art, and more!

Pride

Pride demonstrations can be traced to uprisings led by Black and non-Black trans women of colour resisting police brutality in New York City. Yet Pride today is a corporatized event with significant police presence. In 2016, it was announced that Black Lives Matter-Toronto would be Pride Toronto’s “Honoured Group.” However, Pride Toronto disrespected Black queer and trans communities by spatially marginalizing the showcase stage organized by Black Queer Youth and cutting funds to Blockorama, a party organized by BlacknessYes!. Police were also present at the parade. Black Lives Matter-Toronto brought attention to this and blocked the Pride parade, refusing to move until their demands were considered and agreed to.

Freedom School

Freedom School was a three-week summer program for Black children ages 4-10. It includes visual art, drummers, speeches, and writing letters to men on hunger strikes in Ontario prisons. The curriculum focused on Black Canadian and diasporic history to engage children in political resistance against anti-Black racism and state violence. Yet the Canadian corporate media accused Black Lives Matter-Toronto of being extremist, despite support from parents and community members.

Black Arts

Black artists and photographers are integral to the movement as they document the work Black Lives Matter-Toronto has done. These documentations have been featured in many exhibits in the region. This art is resistance as it interrupts public space with large portraits of Black community members and Indigenous people at resistance sites.

The Victories

Khogali and Hudson consider victory as building a community and creating space to elevate voices. This has resulted in a culture shift where anti-Blackness is discussed in mainstream culture. Black Lives Matter-Toronto’s goal is to eliminate anti-Blackness and white supremacy to build a liberated Black future.

Bibliography

Sandra Hudson and Yusra Khogali, “We Will Win: Black Lives Matter - Toronto,” in *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings*, 2nd edition, edited by Tania Dad Gupta et al. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2018): 695-711.