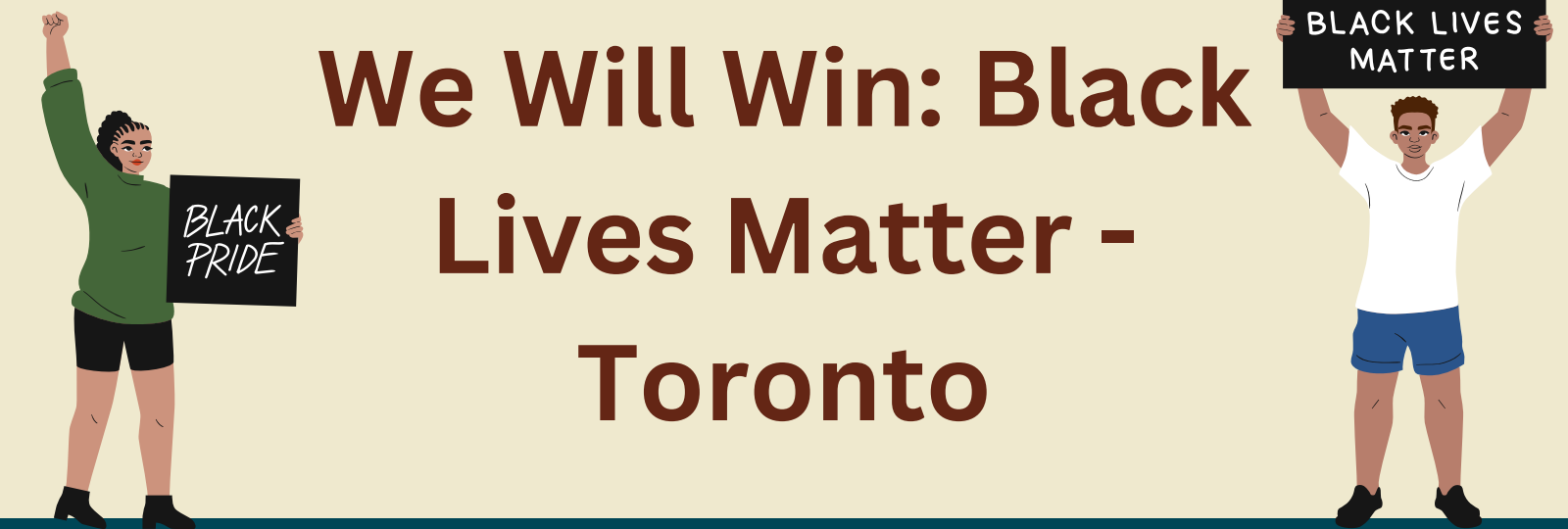




We Will Win: Black Lives Matter - Toronto

Introduction



In 2014, the discourse around anti-Black racism was positioned as an American problem that did not exist in Canada. This idea hinged on the mythical and carefully constructed Canadian identity as the antithesis to the United States. It ignores Canada's history of segregation, slavery, and displacement, and works to make the violence against Black communities in Canada by the police invisible. Anti-Black racism is an inseparable part of Canada's colonial structure. The myth that Canada does not have anti-Black racism is reinforced and maintained through the media's lack of coverage of Black issues in Canada.

Tides are changing

Black Lives Matter activism has helped change Canadian media's language to include coverage of anti-Black racism and encourage justice-oriented organizations in Toronto to educate themselves on the effects of anti-Black racism in their sectors.



History of Black Lives Matter

International



Black Lives Matter (BLM) was created in response to the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in 2012. Black Lives Matter is an international organization for Black liberation and a modern version of the abolitionist movement. Zimmerman was acquitted and never charged; this was a blatant expression of how the legal system continuously protects people who abuse Black people. Alicia Garza, a founding member of the movement, posted an open love letter to Black people on Facebook, signing off with the phrase: "Our lives matter, Black lives matter," sparking the beginning of the movement.





Michael Brown

18-year-old Michael Brown was killed by Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. Black communities around the world grieved this devastating loss. When Wilson received no indictment, the people in Ferguson rioted in protest.

Jermaine Carby

Jermaine Carby was killed by Officer Ryan Reid on September 24, 2014. Reid's name was not released to the public until 2016 and the details around the case, including the possibility police tampered with evidence by planting a knife near Carby after murdering him, were not reported on by the media.

In Canada

When Jermaine Carby was killed by police in Ontario in 2014, a month after Michael Brown was slain, it ignited the movement in Toronto. The name Ryan Reid, the police officer who killed Carby, was not learned until 2016 because of insufficient police transparency laws which kept his name out of public knowledge for two years. The Canadian media's lack of coverage of the details of Carby's case yet reporting on Brown's case reveals how the media was complicit in furthering the myth of Canada's "tolerant multiculturalism," and less racist than the United States. Michael Brown's case certainly warranted extensive coverage, but so did Jermaine Carby's case, and by pointing the finger at the US, the Canadian media perpetuated the myth of the Canadian cultural identity of tolerance, multiculturalism, and 'niceness'.



BLM Toronto Principles

- Stand against violent Canadian colonization and colonial degradation of Black people and Blackness
- Refuse to accept colonial violence and recognize how this violence impacts Black and Indigenous people across Turtle Island
- Form Black unity across white supremacist colonial borders and criticize border politics
- Demand justice, dignity, and liberation for all Black lives
- Recognize intersectionality in resistance



Important Lessons: Power in Community

“All of Us or None of Us”



- BLM Toronto:
- Created a powerful social movement by mobilizing communities against anti-Blackness in government, education, health care, and social services
 - Always includes the affected community and family members in each stage of planning resistance to ensure no undue added trauma is enacted
 - Offers alternative forms of public education, sharing histories of oppression, racism, and resistance in Canada to dispel the myth of tolerance
 - Unapologetically demands decolonization and reparations
 - Practices intersectionality, advocating for and educating people on the experiences of groups based on gender, class, religion and more
 - Performs resistance in ways that are palatable to white culture to avoid alienating white audiences, while maintaining the lexicon of Black culture and refusing to be a “perfect Black activist.”
 - Black academics further Black theory and liberation through their work and lay the foundation for development of further strategies for action

BLM Methods of mobilizing power

- Power is built directly from within the communities, there is never one or a few people with power over others, and BLM has no representative body
- BLM creates public places where communities can advocate for themselves
- Discipline and caution are necessary; change media representatives to avoid creating a single target; variety of identities to reach a mass audience; constant reassessment of strategies and evaluate expectations to better support communities
- Spiral model of care, shifting support to protect changing needs of communities and people to prevent activist burnout and keep communities strong



BLM Activism

Action for Eric Garner

On December 13 2014, there was a die-in protesting the killing of Eric Garner, a Black father selling untaxed cigarettes, at the hands of New York City Police officer Daniel Pantaleo. “I Can’t Breathe” becomes a chant and symbolic of Black people’s inability to breathe under the oppression of white supremacy.



Allen Rd Shutdown

In July 2014, Andrew Loku, a South Sudanese immigrant, recent graduate, and father of five, was killed by police at his apartment complex in Toronto’s Little Jamaica. After a vigil BLM led a day of protest, demanding for the names of the officers present and the video footage from the building. The demonstration shut down Allen Rd, a major highway, in front of a police station and blockaded it for 3 hours demanding accountability and justice until Mayor Tory was forced to address BLM on a public forum.



#BLMTOTentCity

When Toronto police murdered 21-year-old Black man Alex Wettlaufer in March 2015, the BLM community organized a recreation of AfroFest, an African music festival, in response to the killing. The demonstration morphed into a 15-day occupation of Toronto police services headquarters, and demanded an overhaul of the special investigations unit responsible for investigating the ON police. The peaceful sit-in was met with police in riot gear and horses, brutalizing the protesters after most of the media had left. Luckily one cameraman had stayed and captured the ordeal. The BLM community showed incredible strength and unity during this occupation.



Black Liberation Collective

In the fall of 2015, the Black Liberation Collective was inspired by the actions of Black students in the USA resisting anti-Blackness in Missouri. Driven by Black students' stories, students propelled the movement across Canada and demanded affirmative action and institutional changes like divesting from corporations with connections to the prison industrial complex and the mining companies that brutalize African people.

Black History Month

A 2016 demonstration at city hall to protest Toronto Mayor Tory's hypocritical Black History Month celebration after he had ignored requests to meet publicly with Black communities. BLM demanded he address the unacceptable Black Deaths in front of news cameras to make their message public. BLM Toronto opposed Tory's plan to invest 27\$ million in militarizing Toronto police while social services and education are underfunded.



Pride 2016

Pinkwashing is when a group promotes support for LGBTQ rights, often to benefit or profit from it, while simultaneously engaging in actions that contradict those values. Pinkwashing has made the Pride parade into a corporate event and it had lost some of its original meaning as a Black Trans/Queer resistance to New York City police brutality. Considering Toronto's history of police violence against Trans, Queer, and Black communities in the 1980s bathhouse raids of queer bars and spaces and the Pussy Palace raids in the early 2000s, it is hypocritical that Toronto police were a large group participating in the parade. To support Queer and Trans community members BLM Toronto stopped the parade in 2016 to demand that police stop marching in the parade and for the director of the parade to resign. After achieving to end police participation in the parade, BLM Toronto received their most vicious anti-Black response to date, which prompted physical attacks and stalking of Black community members. This prompted nationwide conversations on exclusion and inclusion of police in certain spaces, which is devastating considering the lack of uproar over the continued loss of Black life at the hands of police.



Freedom School

On July 30, 2016, BLM Toronto created a 3-week-long summer program for Black youth in response to a lack of education that centred and celebrated Black and queer identities. The school celebrated visual arts and music as well as initiated a letter-writing campaign for 60 men on hunger strike in Ontarian prisons. Freedom school educated children about Black Canadian history and political resistance against anti-Black racism and state violence.



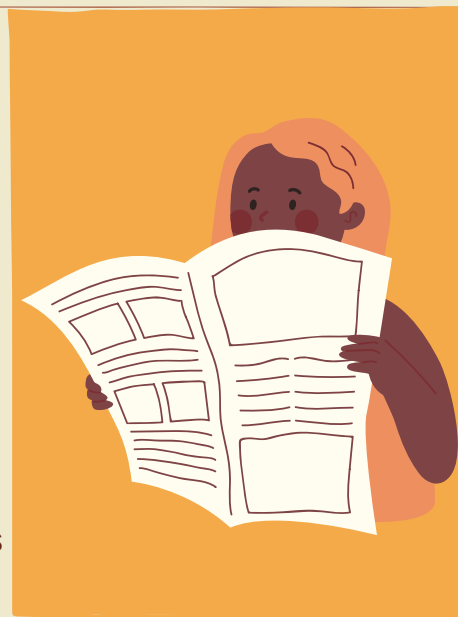
Black Arts

Black visual artists and photographers in Toronto aim to interrupt public spaces as a way of advocating BLM's cause and Black liberation. Public exhibitions of Black and BLM artwork in gallery's and public spaces work to centre black and indigenous people at the sites of resistance.

How to integrate BLM's principles into anti-racist praxis

How to be an Activist

- Study deeply and be deeply knowledgeable about the issue you are resisting
- Recognize the importance of intersectionality and how this impacts people's experiences in the world, how different colonial histories and sociocultural backgrounds inform experiences of violence and trauma
- Take care of your mental health and avoid burnout, find place for joy in the struggle
- Real power comes from community, racism works to isolate people in their experience, building community is the most important part of resistance
- Be public with your activism, lean and draw power from others
- Collaborate for the goals of the group, not based on personal motivations or capitalist venture



Outcomes of BLM's work



- Increased struggle against anti-Blackness in health care, child welfare, migration, and education at all levels
- Inspired actions with Indigenous communities and the struggle against Islamophobia and white supremacy
- Public conversations and increased visibility about Black issues; shifting culture to a "mass consciousness" of the Black struggle in Canada
- Mass media was used as a tool to educate Canadians on anti-blackness and how it must be addressed
- Negotiated commitments from Toronto's school board to implement anti-racism training for all staff
- Advocated for the public release of reports from the Special Investigations Unit, end carding, removal of police floats and armed police officers in the Toronto Pride Parade,
- Advocated for the collection of race-based data in health care, incarceration, education and policing
- There is now a province-wide three-year plan to address racism, and a four-year plan with 47\$ million to implement the Ontarian youth action plan



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