



Burlington Artist Launches Counterattack

“It’s not just about being against something,” said BLM VT member Jabari Jones. “It’s also about being for something.”

Justice, equality, safety, health, and diversity are just a few of the values behind the art Jones created for the Women’s March on Montpelier on January 21st, 2017. In preparation for the rally, Jones collaborated with Vermont artist [Bonnie Acker](#) and a group of Burlington volunteers to craft an assertive message of peaceful resistance against the Trump administration which Jones characterizes as not only “an assault on women’s rights,” but also “a direct assault on democracy.”

With the aid of volunteers, Jones assembled seven goddesses and seven banners; one for each value represented. The goddesses took the form of oversized cardboard heads that one would wear like a mask.

If these larger than life puppets remind you of [Bread and Puppet Theater](#) in Glover Vermont, it’s not a coincidence. Jabari Jones lived and volunteered at Bread and Puppet and described the work and performances there as “life changing.”

Once, Jones aspired to be a comic book artist, but his experience at Bread and Puppet taught him “how to grab any and all arts to

Continued on page 3

A Note from Ebony

“It was so wonderful to be a part of something great coming from Vermont. Let’s hope that white women will consider my words to broaden the feminist agenda by supporting the movement to stop genocide against Black people.”

Ebony Nyoni, Founder of BLM VT

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Battle Continues Over Soul of Policing Policy

Amid complaints about lack of transparency and inclusiveness, requests for additional public forums, and four hours of discussion, attendees of the City of Burlington's January 24th Police Commissioners' meeting further refined the fair and impartial policing policy. The Board of Police Commissioners, which is chartered to manage the police department, met in inclement weather; one Police Commissioner and Mark Hughes, BLMVT member and founder of Justice for All, joined the meeting virtually.

"We need to look at use of force in a programmatic way," stated Hughes, kicking off the forum and referencing a report regarding police conduct. "We need a solid benchmark on use of force. [It] needs to be part of the fair and impartial policing policy."

Ebony Nyoni, Founder of Black Lives Matter Vermont, added her voice to the forum, speaking about the previous policy meeting, and the lack of notice and responsiveness on the part of the ad hoc committee and the police department. "We were told about December's meeting at the last minute," Nyoni challenged, "This should be advertised to the affected communities. We need to be given

a chance to review what was composed. This policy sets out to alleviate problems that black people in Burlington face on a daily basis."

Nyoni continued, criticizing a draft created behind closed doors without soliciting in-

"Are we being extorted
by the federal
government here?"
Mark Hughes

put from Black Lives Matter Vermont, "This is not how we should be operating as a community. How are you writing this without getting our input? How do you expect to develop training? Without input from communities of color, racial training will be a fluff ball. Who will you hire? What will the competencies be? When someone breaks the rules in the policy, what is the protocol? What will be the opportunity for justice?"

In addition to criticism regarding access and input, deviations from the state model policy and the influence of the federal government on local policy dominated conversation.

The State of Vermont mandated all police departments to implement a fair and impartial policing policy by July 2016. Twenty-five departments have accepted the state model policy, verbatim, while the Burlington Police Department's version includes a number of edits. Some of the most substantial changes center on excluding immigration status from protected "personal characteristics". This change was made by city attorneys who principally seek to remain in compliance with U.S. Code 1373, which states that local agencies shall not prohibit communications between local law officers and U.S. Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Advocates from Migrant Justice and

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

Fair and Impartial Policing:
[State Model Policy](#)
[BPD's Current Draft](#)

Burlington Police Department
[BPD Transparency Portal](#)

[Use of Force Presentation](#)
(full report forthcoming)

["Data: BPD more likely to pull gun on non-whites"](#) (Burlington Free Press)

continued on page 3

Burlington Artist, continued from page 1

say something. To do something,” Jones said. Turning his talents towards political change, today, Jones’ art goes way beyond “the 2-D world of comics.” Jones’ bold, minimalist marks create stark images that pack a punch. Jones is interested in innovation, and especially, innovative protest. “Protests run up against opposition that wants to restrict the effectiveness of the protest,” Jones said. “To marginalize its power so that it doesn’t disrupt the regular flow of daily life, of power, of traffic. There is a constant push to make protests impotent. So we have to be creative.”

As part of his involvement with BLM Vermont, Jones hosts a Creative [Protest workshop](#); a “laboratory” for new ways to stand up in resistance to the patriarchy.



BLM VT member Jabari Jones. Photo courtesy of [Jenya Chernoff](#).

The Women’s March on Montpelier, possibly the [largest demonstration](#) the statehouse lawn has ever seen, overwhelmed those opposing forces with its sheer numbers. Jones intended to arrange the goddesses just so, and maintain the integrity of the walking art installation throughout the rally, but there were so many people that Jones said he and other organizers “were barely able to get the thing going in the right direction, and once we did, it couldn’t be stopped.”

Multiple times in our conversation, Jones emphasized the importance of critical thinking and self-education. It is important to know what one believes

“in order to be able to stand up for it,” Jones said. No matter how long the march, starting with a clear message must be the first step.

Policing Policy, continued from page 2

BLMVT took issue with those changes. “The disentangling of the local police from ICE is important,” stated Hughes. He then asked the room at large, “Are we being extorted by the federal government here? Before we make these changes simply because the federal government says that they will withhold grant money from us, I think the question we need to ask our-

selves is this: What is this money worth to us? Whose

Commissioner Sarah Kenny called it the largest crowd she had ever seen at a meeting.

law are we complying with?”
The use of force report,

presented at the meeting by BPD data analyst Eric Fowler and Chief of Police Brandon Del Pozo, is deeply relevant to communities of color in Burlington. This study organizes trended data from 2010-2016, though the full report has not yet been completed (see list of links). One of the clearest conclusions from the

continued on page 4

Policing Policy, continued from page 3

years of data is that non-white citizens are more likely to have BPD police officers pull a gun on them, according to the presentation.

The meeting was very well attended; Commissioner Sarah Kenny called it the largest crowd she had ever seen at a meeting. By its end, advocates from a number of communities had spoken up about gaps in the process and the police chief and staff had shared new data.

The Police Commission has taken up the charge to provide more advance notice and supplemental public meetings to gather feedback and input from affected groups. Ebony Nyoni is working directly with the Board of Police Commissioners to set up a time for members of the Black community to share input before the next draft of the policy.

Upcoming Events

BLM Day at the Statehouse in Montpelier is [February 9th!](#) Join us for a day of events. More information online.

BLM VT has monthly meetings every second Monday at the Integrated Arts Academy in Burlington. Our next meeting will be [February 13th](#). All are welcome!

Keanga-Yamahtta Taylor, author of “From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation,” will speak at University of Vermont on [February 23rd](#) in the Davis Center (Silver Maple Room) at 7pm. Free, open to public.

Become a Member of Black Lives Matter Vermont!

Black Lives Matter Vermont is a growing network of individuals, families and businesses invested in the liberation of Black Vermonters, and the deactivation of systemic racism endured by all people of color in our state. Membership is a way to help redistribute money in Vermont and offer resources to the fight for freedom and safety for Black people. It also is a way to build a network of information and support. Our goal is for 10% of Vermont to be members by 2018. It is a big, brave, and we believe, achievable goal.

Support the Transformation at
blacklivesmattervermont.com/membership/

Visit or Volunteer at our shop
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