

**BLACK  
LIVES  
MATTER**



## What's going on with Black Lives Matter Vermont?

Black Lives Matter Vermont is a movement, not a moment. We are still here, advocating for the wellness of black Vermont communities and taking a stand for the value of black lives. We continue to fight for black lives by championing the educational rights of black students, holding law enforcement accountable to just and fair policing for black Vermonters, and providing programs and supports to advance the needs of the black community.

In November of 2016, just days after President Trump was elected, Ebony Nyoni and a small group of dedicated activists called a Black Lives Matter meeting. The turnout was staggering in the Winooski circle, estimated at over 300, and after rousing speeches, the rally developed into a nighttime march through the streets in which the name of the organization became the battle cry of the protesters. We shouted "Black Lives Matter" into the streets, declaring our existence even though most of us were unsure of what our involvement would entail.

Responding to the urgency of our moment in history, BLMVT formed at lightning speed, and as it did so, its structures were never completely clear. At present, leaders, members, supporters, and activists who are within or near to the BLMVT movement are taking close looks at what BLMVT must be, who BLMVT can incorporate, and how BLMVT ought to operate. There have been many changes over the past year, there will be many transitions to come, and even at present, the movement is actively working to negotiate the ongoing evolution of who BLMVT is. Amidst this change, one thing has remained certain: BLMVT is a movement of Vermonters who are invested in proactively and persistently disrupting racism while advocating for and affirming the dignity, rights, and concerns of Vermont's black people.

## BLMVT newsletter update

It is with recognition that the newsletter itself is a conduit of the movement, not an independent wing. As a newsletter, we are grateful for the opportunity to speak with, to, and for those interested and invested in while challenging racism in our state. Our bias is anti-racist and anti-white supremacy.

Our goals remain the same: we aim to advance a multi-faceted perspective on the needs and concerns of black Vermonters and allies for racial justice within the Green Mountain state.

Our commitments have not changed: We are dedicated to keeping our readers informed on issues within our statewide movement and on matters close to the heart of racial justice.

Our purpose has not changed: We see the newsletter as a useful vehicle for highlighting ideas and events while building community and bringing visibility to our cause.

## *Black Lives Matter Guiding Principles*

At this moment, we feel it is beneficial, grounding and relevant to point readers to the guiding principles of the Black Lives Matter movement. [Click here](#) to read on the BLM website: who we are, our founders, and our guiding principles.

1. Diversity-We are committed to acknowledging, respecting and celebrating difference(s) and commonalities
2. Globalism-We see ourselves as part of the global Black family and we are aware of the different ways we are impacted or privileged as Black folk who exist in different parts of the world
3. Black Women-We are committed to building a Black women affirming space free from sexism, misogyny, and male-centeredness
4. Black Villages-We are committed to disrupting the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and “villages” that collectively care for one another, and especially “our” children to the degree that mothers, parents and children are comfortable
5. Loving Engagement-We are committed to embodying and practicing justice, liberation, and peace in our engagements with one another

## What's going on in the country?

Over the summer observers around the nation were disturbed to see the events that unfolded in Charlottesville, VA. A large group of white men descended upon the university town to celebrate xenophobia, revel in bigotry, and proclaim white supremacy. They pontificate a message that hollowly echoed the anti-Semitic hatred that stained our grandparent's generation, and with Tiki Torches held aloft they invoked images from America's blood-soaked age of hooded horsemen and lynching. The U.S. was shocked when her president stood before her people to defend the marchers and demonize those who stood against them. Vermonters were shocked to learn that one of our number joined with racists to spew anti-Semitism and hold a torch for bigotry.

But make no mistake: What happened in Charlottesville is disgusting, disturbing, inexcusable, and entirely endemic of where we stand as a nation—and where we stand as Vermonters—when it comes to race, racism, and racial justice. We here in Vermont are connected by more than the short-order cook who trooped southward to march with confederate apologists and white nationalists.

We are connected to the racist hatred of Charlottesville by exclusionary discipline practices that prey upon students of color, restraining, secluding, suspending, expelling, and arresting these black and brown youth at rates that far outpace those of their peers. We are connected by our rates of Black incarceration, one of the most disproportionate in the nation. We are connected by biased policing that stops, searches, arrests, and prosecutes black and brown people at higher rates and slaps them with stiffer penalties. We are connected to Charlottesville by the illusion that so easily lulls so many of us into complacency, making us forget too quickly, too happily, that we aren't living in a post-racial utopia but a prison of our own making.

## *Black Lives Matter Guiding Principles*

6. Restorative Justice-We are committed to collectively, lovingly and courageously working vigorously for freedom and justice for Black people and, by extension all people. As we forge our path, we intentionally build and nurture a beloved community that is bonded together through a beautiful struggle that is restorative, not depleting

7. Collective value-We are guided by the fact all Black lives, regardless of actual or perceived sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, economic status, ability, disability, religious beliefs or disbeliefs, immigration status or location

8. Empathy-We are committed to practicing empathy; we engage comrades with the intent to learn about and connect with their contexts

9. Queer Affirming-We are committed to fostering a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking or, rather, the belief that all in the world are heterosexual unless s/he or they disclose otherwise

10. Unapologetically black-We are unapologetically Black in our positioning. In affirming that Black Lives Matter, we need not qualify our position. To love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a necessary prerequisite for wanting the same for others

The prison's bars thicken with every inaction we commit and every attempt to mentally distance ourselves from "those other people" who have a race problem. The bars thicken every time we fail to engage in the hard work of enacting justice for our black brothers, sisters, and family here at home.

What happened in Charlottesville can happen anywhere that people are not vigilant, committed, active in the fight for racial justice. Black Lives Matter Vermont understands this. We, your BLMVT newsletter writers, understand this. This is why we continue the work.

The struggle to dismantle white supremacy, and confront racism in all forms, requires many hands, minds, and hearts. The movement for black lives continues this great cause, building on and evolving from previous eras in order to address both the systemically racist foundations of this country, as well as the many insidious forms that white supremacy takes in a neoliberal globalized economy. Militarized police forces brutalize Black, brown, and poor Americans across the U.S. while endless war terrorizes people of color around the globe. Public schools close in city after city while private prisons grow in numbers and profits. We've been dosed with entertainment-as-news to the point where we have a cultural addiction to the kind of lazy, profit-crazed reporting that draws parallels between Black Lives Matter and Neo-Nazi groups. We've seen a reverence for freedom of speech and authentic self-expression that seems to override principles of justice, safety and common decency. All the while, Wall Street and the military-industrial complex buy candidates and elections, consume the national budget, and pillage communities.

While the president uses all of his influence to forge new chains with which to repress those in our country who are already most at risk, we need to show the world that there are still Americans who will welcome diversity and will challenge bigotry even as it wraps itself in our flag as a defense for its small-mindedness.

It goes without saying that the U.S. has never been pure, and our system has never been fair. We are indeed living in dark times. Yet, black people have proven time and time again that they possess the strength, knowledge, and passion to fight the worse that this country can throw on them. If Black Lives Matter can provide any assistance to this fight, even if incremental, then it is worthwhile.

Until the next newsletter, with love and in solidarity,

BLMVT Newsletter

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11. Transgender affirming-We are committed to embracing and making space for trans brothers and sisters to participate and lead. We are committed to being self-reflexive and doing the work required to dismantle cis-gender privilege and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence

12. Black families-We are committed to making our spaces family-friendly and enable parents to fully participate with their children. We are committed to dismantling the patriarchal practice that requires mothers to work "double shifts" that require them to mother in private even as they participate in justice work

13. Intergenerational-We are committed to fostering an intergenerational and communal network free from ageism. We believe that all people, regardless of age, shows up with capacity to lead and learn.