

4 July 2017

Councillor Wong-Tam, Councillor Paul Ainslie, and Toronto City Councillors, we the undersigned, insist that this motion, MM31.21, be withdrawn.

We write to you regarding the proposed City of Toronto's "Intersectionality Awareness Week." Our thinking is quite straightforward: the term, intersectionality, which is one of the more radical Black feminist frameworks through which questions of differential oppression can be theorized and resisted, is being deployed by the City of Toronto in furthering the uncritical claims to being a city of diversity, multiculturalism and inclusion.

We cannot dismiss the timing of this proposal. "Intersectionality Awareness Week" is proposed in the wake of: Black Lives Matter-TO ongoing demands; Black Lives Matter disruption of Toronto Pride parades (2016-present); the ongoing discussion of police presence in Toronto schools; Black Lives Matter allegiances with and support of Idle No More and other indigenous struggles; and, the report from the inquest into Andrew Loku (and the ruling of homicide). The city has done nothing to address the struggles Black communities have faced in Toronto--the city does not generate the radical Black feminist theorizing and activism intersectionality demands. Indeed, we would suggest that intersectionality is, for many Black and other marginalized communities in the city, an outlook and a way of life: we navigate multiple oppressions as we move from moment to moment and space to space. The proposal for "Intersectionality Awareness Week," notably disregards our longstanding history of negotiating anti-blackness and engendering ways to resist it.

As is well known, and as many Black and other scholars and activists have shown, diversity initiatives obscure and/or erase the complex and very material oppressions poor and marginalized communities experience. Importantly, we wish to provide some context surrounding this proposal, including the emergence of this proposal so soon after the outcome of the inquest into the death of Andrew Loku, a mentally ill Black man; and the fact that this version of "intersectionality" was drafted without consultation of Black folks, without reference to Blackness, and without taking into account Black women's labour and the feminist politics that the original term encompasses. For us, at this moment, Loku's murder and consequent inquest weighs heavy. **For this and other reasons, a group of us--Black activists, scholars, community workers--have been working to have the "Intersectionality Awareness Week" initiative withdrawn.**

In short, "intersectionality" as it is proposed and used in this motion, is an empty symbol. We ask Council members to *not* support this initiative, as it erases Black life and Black struggles, and serves to placate the difficult and everyday experiences of Black and other marginalized communities. This motion also fails to grasp how the City of Toronto has failed to incorporate the nuances of intersectionality into the work of the city.

We are very concerned with what an “Intersectionality Awareness Week” would do in a city in Canada where Black life is under tremendous stress. Indeed, the term is being put forward in a celebratory way, while Black and other marginalized people struggle, day to day, to navigate the ins and outs of racial capitalism. “Intersectionality Awareness Week”--emptied out diversity in disguise--is thus being advanced by and from the very city governance that harms Black and other marginalized communities. While we could go back several decades and provide a genealogy of tensions between the city, police, and Black people, here are some very recent examples of the struggles the Black community is facing in Toronto and with Toronto City Hall:

- Carding and racial profiling/stop-and-frisk
- Cutting of outreach programs and debates over the police budgets including but not limited to: the AIDS Service Organizations, Black CAP, mental health crisis support, homelessness.
- Relocation and eviction of families in Toronto low-income housing
- Streaming of Black youth out of education
- Killing of Black and other marginalized people by the police
- Continuing existence (and use) of illegally collected data by Toronto Police Services of Black (and racialized) Torontonians
- Toronto City Council's unclear position on anti-black policy of School Resource POLICE Officers in Toronto Schools

We do not simply want the city to get the wording right in terms of “Intersectional” or “Intersectionality.” Now is not the right time for “Intersectionality Awareness Week.”

We want a commitment from the City of Toronto to actually do some substantive work in helping Black people live our lives fully.

We ask Council to vote no to this motion and instead commit to engaging in meaningful conversations with Black people in Toronto about how to implement the work of intersectionality into the City of Toronto.

Councillor Wong-Tam, Councillor Paul Ainslie, and Toronto City Council, we insist that you put your energies into actually **implementing** an intersectionality focus framework for the city.

We insist that you instead spend your energies on doing the work.

Become a leader in doing intersectionally focused work before you consider an “Intersectionality Awareness Week.”

Lead before you teach!

Signed,

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