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# Black Futures on

# Eglinton

An arts based community cultural mapping study with youth on Black culture, in confront of anti-Black racism

# Poem Book

This Poem Book includes selected poems and works contributed by locals from a prompt to explore, through creative writing, the challenges, futures, and aspirations of Black people.

Poems were submitted February - March 2020.

6 of the poems in this book were turned into lyric videos and performed at the community event: Lyrics, Libations, and Conversations. To view the lyric videos produced, [click here](#).

To view the Study and Recommendations Report, [click here](#).

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# Black Futures on Eglinton West

## Motion

Writers

poets

emcees

scribes

Write the story

the future

Eglinton West

word to the sounds

the sights

the scents

the colours

the rhythms

the accents

Black Futures

Write the vision of community to come

write of legacy

language

home

Write of nation

migration

movement

libation

pour a little

Remembering the ones that's gone

you know the sacred places

where ghosts lie

and ancestors fly

Write the history

the work

thesweat and blood

the brick by brick

the laying ground and building up

Speak it

let syllables flow over the tongue

let the riddim run

paint pictures of Black meccas

heart beat centres

Turn it up

let the decibels shake every brick

and every block

write it down write it down write it down

speaking it up

Black borders

criss cross the caverns of the cross town

the uptown of downtown

the middle ground

Black spaces

where brown faces stay

where shops have first names

and first dollars are framed

on the walls

Run cross the asphalt

for motherland cloth

Nyabingi live in the beat of our walk.

Write words that cross their barriers  
the boarded up, the burned down  
the bought and sold

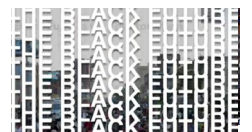
Speak lines that flow  
through the throughway  
Name our spots  
dub the streets signs  
buy the blocks  
build the centres

Revive  
reconstruct  
open the gates  
past to future creates  
can't erase us

Our DNA deep  
in the epidermis  
rising temperatures  
multi coloured melanin  
adrenaline of survival

The thrival  
the rush  
the creating  
the making  
the celebrating  
the US

Black Future



# Brick by Brick

Hassan Abdallah

Brick by brick  
I am surrounded  
Buildings make up my feelings  
The sky is the limit  
Yet I am surrounded by ceilings  
I see through the glass  
Through the hope we've amassed  
Together

Together  
We are what cannot be taken  
Not one or the other  
But one another  
And brick by brick we uplift each other

Skyscrapers scrape my soul  
But the buildings on my block make me whole  
My home is everything  
But outside lies everything I wanted  
And more

Community is circumstance  
But I'm certain that  
The gravity  
Our situation  
What brought us close  
The roots that we hold dear  
Are what we fear  
Most

I toast the streets that moulded my clay skin  
Told me black is beautiful  
Where the sun kissed my melanin  
Melancholy with nostalgia  
And I'm not regretting it  
City sleeping on my ends  
I don't know who gave them a sedative

Irony  
We tore down our walls  
To build a community  
Brick by brick  
A foundation predicated on unity

The street sings Somber symphonies  
I stop at the bus stop for a soft soliloquy  
A moment of reflection before a neon interlude

Brick by brick  
A block becomes a neighborhood  
Brick by brick  
I realized I misunderstood

You see those who throw shade  
Are afraid of your warmth  
Lives change  
With a single phrase

Sticks and stones  
Are sticks and stones  
Words pierce the heart  
And chill the bone

But my community is more than a word  
My community is home



18-24 y.o

# Fragments: That Is How Memory Works

Kalia Douglas-Micallef

Underneath the untouchable exterior lies a pre-owned body, much rather touched  
Beyond her years  
Emotions are bubbling in my chest, rising to the surface  
The lack of air in my lungs keep them from bursting  
Ready to release, the pressure halts, storing in my cells, silently intensifying  
Manifesting through popped veins  
My blood pumps anger as a main source of Iron, dissolving in toxic clouds of smoke  
A burning sensation remains in my throat, gagging with a straw, that is how memory  
works  
Sweeping shattered glass that are really and truly shards of my spirit  
As if dumping to waste reminds me that I can clean up after myself, I step on a piece of  
hidden glass  
My inner child bellows and demands to be heard, disorienting under time  
The clock strikes midnight and I am indifferent  
My name echoes disturbingly in the chambers of my soul  
Startled by the call of my name while a smile creases your face, my veins have  
collapsed  
My body was never mine. “





# Greys

Kalia Douglas-Micallef

Good mourning

I always feel like somebody's watchin me

Tainted obligation

Let the truth sting

I saw what I saw, where the wild things are

Perfect little accident

Sympathy for the parents, how insensitive

Shock to the system, can't fight biology

These ties that bind

Sympathy for the Devil

An honest mistake, my favourite mistake

I will follow you into the dark, stand by me

Sweet surrender

These arms of mine, that's me trying

What a difference a day makes, something's gotta give

Adrift and at peace

Almost grown

I will survive.



# Untitled

Keosha Dwyer

This is for all the black girls who wanted to bleach their skin in six grade

Me too.

I remember perm after perm, damaging my black roots

Imagine being in a school or job where no one looked like you

Where beauty met a certain standard that you could never meet

In middle school people were surprised I could speak so fluently

As if English wasn't fit for my tongue

As if my skin screamed I'm not good enough.

But I am not sorry that your stereotypes don't fit

And that I am more than you think

I will not be anything less than –

Unapologetically black and full of greatness

I am proud of this rich, dark skin.

The same skin that the sun fell in love with

Doesn't it suck being so jealous?

You thought ivory was the only thing beautiful until you saw me

Intelligent, divine and care-free

The sun had already declared my beauty.

It does not see what you see

And I will not apologize for doing better. I will not apologize for excelling or following my dreams.

you thought you'd keep us slaves forever

But I am not what you expected me to be

The underestimates you have are none of my business proving you wrong is.

Being me is

Being Black is

So, you don't have to love my skin

Because I already think it's all that

And if you disagree

You can just kiss my Black

...



# Untitled

Jerusha brathwaite

Black boy black fathers

black men black Ken

When will you learn to value your melanin

Where is your strength , what happened to you my friend?

When did you let the pain of your forefathers past down to your own black  
mothers penetrate the soul and swallow you whole now you just like them .

When will we break this cycle of chains

Don't recycle the BLAME

claim your rights

You king ?

Well iight

Fight.

For us they taking us by the thousands

You are our protectors so why is you bowin?

Down to the man. Let him know

If Jesus walks . I can.



# Stella and I

Shanice Francis

Opening my eyes  
Like realizing that something is dying inside  
The phone ringing is a sign  
I miss my block

Hopping in my car  
Stella and I  
To go home is to take a trip back in time  
But...I miss my block

There were times I felt good  
Seeing everyone's faces  
All of us in one place  
Now it's hard to tell if I've arrived  
If home is a collection of buildings, all white  
And a library is a construction site

Stella won't open her eyes  
"I don't wanna see no more  
"Maybe some other time..."  
I miss my block

Had a feeling this day would come  
Heard it under the music  
On all the radio stations  
But still...  
Houses, corner stores  
The home girl's old house  
Where after school motives showed out in the park  
With freedom  
And hide and seek



Long days  
I wish my kids could see  
To know where I really come from  
To own a part of this neighbourhood  
To be where all the fun would be  
To touch things only kept in a picture  
And things that never were but should have been  
Youth clubs  
And fancy restaurants for us  
Playgrounds with seating areas and no rush  
Fun fairs  
Concerts for Black History Month every year  
Summer bake sales  
Training centres letting girls be social workers  
Training centres letting girls be  
High schools for Black kids  
And no need to miss my block

Opening my eyes  
Like realizing that something is dying inside  
The phone ringing is a sign  
I miss my block

Hopping in my car  
Stella and I  
To go home is to take a trip back in time  
But...I miss my block



# I am... I Exist

Kwame Symbolik Newman-Bremang

These walls are liquid  
I feel myself fall into them all  
become one with my surroundings  
Reminisce on the limitlessness  
Of where and when... I am... I exist

Striving aspiring  
where it once seemed I could have drown  
Instead the seed sprout and roots are laid down

What once seemed foreign  
Cold dangerous and alone  
Memories and ancestry are now here... in this new home  
Now I thrive and am so alive  
Holding that thread that makes amends and stitches old thoughts with  
the new

... and mends what was done and what was said from the beginning,  
now, to the end

From the ancestors lungs whispered metaphors that thunder true today

That reverberates on... across time  
In barbershops, bookstores, living and dining rooms, city halls,  
community spaces and salons.

Over and over we recreate  
Shift and metamorph  
Again we become  
What we are...

Wise, kind, caring, peaceful, brave... great.  
These are the truths that resonate  
when I question time space and place

In the most healthy, calm and connected state  
I'm losing were I end  
From were we begin  
Finding self within

Present...  
After trials tribulations, false proclamations and  
denials

But truth is this gust of air  
that must be delivered

Connection  
that today and tomorrow uplifts  
Whichever space we touch  
This is our gift

These walls are liquid  
I feel myself fall into them all  
become one with my surroundings  
Reminisceokay on the limitlessness  
Of where and when... I am... I exist



# Black Lenses

Dorian Francois

The neighbourhood that we live in now and the one I spent growing up in are two completely different neighbourhoods. The same boys who would ride their bikes and play manhunt all day are now the young men who are in and out of jail living a life that hides their full potential. I believe a lot of us grew up too fast, in a blink of an eye we weren't the young kids playing in the grass but were the young adults playing in greener things. The stores that we used to go to with our family are now messy lots full of construction. But what hasn't changed are the small businesses that bring culture and familiarity to Eglinton West. Though we've changed and grown we are lucky enough to have the small things that are the same. Now grown up in Eglinton West we still have trips to Mainsha's on Tuesday's, Tim Hortons ice capps and hot days at Fairbank Pool.

Not everybody shows their hurt and not everybody shows their struggle but when those struggles are mutual it isn't hard to tell. We are all going through different struggles. Gentrification, big companies are coming to the neighbourhood and raising rent prices on different stores forcing them out of their own establishment. These companies are slowly changing the place that we call home. Education, I see a lot of my peers struggling with this aspect of life, some days I see myself struggling with it as well. I come from a generation that knows they want to make money and be financially stable but rather reach that goal through different paths. School is a big box that drains your energy and time filled with teachers educating you on things you feel are irrelevant. The streets, I don't know much about the streets and what it's like to be in them because I've been blessed enough to have the resources I need. Just because I'm not in the streets doesn't mean my peers aren't. I know young men who chose this lifestyle and young men who slipped into it. The same kids I grew up with and went to middle school with are the same kids whose friends pray they are freed. We are all facing different challenges and different struggles but we are strong enough to survive.



# Eglinton Avenue West - My Neighbourhood

Honey Novick

"Darling, you are my shining star  
don't you go away"

I first heard the words to this song somewhere  
a long time ago  
but needed to hear it again and again  
I needed to sing it for the children  
I needed to sing it with the children

one balmy evening, Heather and I  
drove north to Eglinton Avenue West  
we were in search of a recording of this song,  
an LP, 78 rpm, 33rpm  
and we find it, a long play, in a  
Jamaican music store  
I bought it  
played it over and over  
and wore it out

when the time came to leave Bellwoods,  
I came to Oakwood and Eglinton  
found a place nearby  
I was in "happyland" - close to where I could buy  
veggie patties - peppery and good  
sorrel leaves  
limacol  
and I was happy  
here, I could remember Jamaica and my friend  
who died of AIDS. This friend asked me to go  
to Montego Bay, find the water's edge  
say the daimoku, for him  
(the invocation of the law of cause and effect)  
because he couldn't  
and in time I did do exactly that

Bluma Appel heard this story,  
from where or whom, I don't know  
and one day, in the mail, a raised-gold leaf envelope  
and invitation came,  
a ceremony honouring friends and family of those  
whose lives were taken by AIDS was being held  
at Ontario's Parliament Buildings  
Maurice and I went, the town crier called us in  
very British, pomp and circumstance  
and humbling

when I came north to settle in my new home  
I walked the streets of memories and new beginnings  
one day I drove north, turning right off of Oakwood  
onto Eglinton and it is traffic-jammed  
it is a big city vibe

was it my imagination? was that a bullet  
flying by?  
it didn't hit me and it didn't hurt me  
physically  
but I was seared  
and commented to my friend Clifton  
but he looked at me deeply  
and said nothing  
what could he say?  
would this be an issue to scare me away from  
the neighbourhood?  
this would be a deciding factor -  
my choice of what to do  
and so I did nothing except heal  
it is hurtful to know that there are  
some people who can't see the consequences  
of a loaded gun  
i don't navigate anywhere near gun culture  
I realize  
bullets are man made  
it is the man - the hu-man  
that I have to live with  
and so i looked deep inside me

and felt a hurt that was my hurt  
and wasn't my hurt, at the same time  
I believe with all my heart that people are  
good  
everywhere, except when they're not  
and that all of life is a crap shoot  
live it  
and that's what I did  
I stayed in the "hood"  
and ate in the hood and shopped in the hood  
buying colourful, flowing clothes  
and was happy smelling memories  
and knowing new beginnings are seeds  
that have sprouted and need to be nurtured  
this is my community  
this music beats in my blood  
this spirit is my teacher  
this world is what I make of it

Darlin', you are my shining star.

“Don't you go away”

Close to where I could buy veggie patties,  
peppery and good sorrel leaves limacot



# Black Futures on Eglinton

Dorian Francois

J.Cole once said “things change, rearrange, and so do I”  
We are constantly changing as things are rearranging in our lives  
The small thing that play out day to day form into the big things  
that are changing our lives  
We don't see the change until it's too late  
We don't see the change till we're up late  
praying that our brothers are safe  
Because they aren't the young boys who played all day  
They've become the young MEN who play bigger, more dangerous games  
We've grown up to fast and lost the ability to smile the same  
No longer young kids playing in the grass but now the young adults  
playing in greener things  
**Lifes a play so who's the master pulling on our strings.**

“It's beauty in the struggle, ugliness in the success”  
Were all going through it, but doing our best  
If I looked you in the face and told I could relate  
All your pain and sorrows, I wouldn't have to borrow  
Because I was scared of what'd I have to face in all my tomorrow's  
“It's beauty in the struggle, ugliness in the success”  
At our lowest point we find beauty in our distress  
Are you looking at the bigger picture  
Or the small details that dance inbetween  
**Lifes a drug and were the biggest fiend**  
All living the same dream  
Do you ever wonder if you'll make it past  
16 maybe 17 hell even 18  
**Because whose to save us when our master is nowhere to be seen**





# Eg-West Has heart

Dutchess Obanor

I visited Eglinton after 20 years and saw a huge difference walking through the same sidewalks I did when I was a kid. It sent shivers down my spine and my ribs, smelling the scent of the freshly painted yellow lines on the road and the fuel coming from the train running through eglinton - it gave me flashbacks of the times me and my friends used to wonder when the construction would end. As I'm walking through the streets of Eglinton I'm coming across changes that have been made. The first one shocked me the most, they took down all the little stores and combined them into a whole mall that features black culture. I felt like this was a good change because instead of having to go store to store there's a mall that provides everything you need such as food, candy, clothing, hairdressers and more.

The second change I noticed was the bus route - there was now a 32E which toured through the whole of Eglinton. Not only did this give tourists an opportunity to tour around and get to know the block but it also saved time. Everyone loved this new transit update.

The third thing I noticed as I was walking through the streets of Eglinton was a new community center for black youth. This community center gave the kids a spot to chill and do their homework, and it also kept them busy so they could stay out of the streets and out of trouble. Kids loved that community center, it always gave the kids somewhere safe to go everyday after school, and even on weekends, it's open.

The final thing I came across during my time on Eglinton is that they turned what used to be a Mcdonalds into a community swimming pool, which was filled when i went inside and it seemed like everyone enjoyed it.

After walking through Eglinton after 20 years, I can truly say it has changed for the better and it is just the beginning.



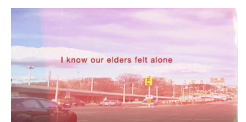
# Likkle Jamaica is an Experience

Ms Faith, Iman Turner

Likkle Jamaica is an experience  
So mek wi come & talk di tings  
About a community built  
From the energies we bring  
Leaving Black countries for Canada  
I know our elders felt alone  
So grateful they came together  
To create for us this home  
Went to war against the law  
For our patties, go figure  
Did more than drape up  
Anyone who dared to call us “nigger”  
Built each other up  
When we could look to no where else for help  
Eglinton West became the place  
Where we could be ourselves  
From Marlee to Scarlett Rd.  
Continuously building vibes  
The streets had a rhythm  
That couldn't be denied  
The record shop near Marlee  
Where Denise & them worked  
My dad's a music man  
So we'd be stopping there 1st  
Between them & the jewelry shop  
Was Guy from Singapore  
Sold & fixed amplifiers, record needles and  
much more  
Suits & jeans at Kaydee's  
Clark's, Timbs and shoes for real  
Didn't have the full price?  
He was down to give a deal  
The music would draw you  
Into TreaJah Isle across the street

Natty B behind the counter  
Runnin' tunes & skinnin' teet'  
Then back across to Raps  
Or Spence's, it's your choice  
Saying “Hi!” to Monica  
Through the blaring gospel voice  
She & the many beauty shops  
Served our community for years  
Giving sound advice & easing our fears  
I would go to Mr. Jerk for the  
Rice and peas alone  
Could taste the coconut in it  
Plantain & pepper sauce would bring it  
home  
My sweetest memories  
When the days were hot  
Nyamming a snow cone  
Outside of Fisher's shop  
With the Slush Puppy syrup  
After having a Randy's patty  
Might go check Sister P  
Or get a juice from Juicy  
Or down the street at Jaydee's  
For some back to school shopping  
Needed them Parasucos  
Then I'd hop on the bus  
So further west we go  
To DJ Records, home of King Stur Grav  
Making sure Roots Reggae culture  
Flourishes in its path  
The bulla from Sunlight Bakery  
Is sweet and light  
Line ups out the door for hardo bread  
Would go into the night

Or until they're sold out  
Easter or Christmas had the line ups  
Going down the block  
Out-of-towners missioning for  
A taste of home  
A connection that we feel  
Deep inside our bones  
Ital Veggie, Tinnel's  
I can go on naming more  
Businesses that helped shape  
Eglinton memories and more  
Nothing compares to Jamaica Day in the park,  
On the south side past Keele  
Blasting music in the parks  
Running soccer on the fields  
We all have endless memories  
That Eglinton completes  
They denied building transit in 1995  
In favour of where Bessarion meets  
The richer Sheppard Ave.  
The poor, they weren't trying to serve  
So we can't leave it up to them  
For our culture to be preserved  
We saw St. Clair  
They know the effects  
Keep that in mind  
When they come with fake respect  
Way more than Reggae Lane  
Always will be  
No mattee what happens next  
We'll keep creating history



25-35 y.o

# Acknowledgments

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We are grateful for the decades and legacies of advocacy that led to the existence of the Ministry of Heritage's Community Support for Black Canadian Youth program, by which this study is funded. This fund was established due to the Black residents and allies across Canada who advocated many years for the Government of Canada to commit funds in participation of the United Nation's declaration of 2015 - 2024 as the Decade for People of African Descent (DPAD). This recognized decade encourages governments to address systemic anti-Black racism. Canada recognized this decade in 2018, 3 years after it was launched. This recognition happened because the Black community and allies pushed to have it recognized; without this labour it is possible that the Government of Canada may not have committed the funds and the Black Futures on Eglinton cultural mapping study would therefore not have been possible.

Canada's acknowledgment of the Decade for People of African Descent is of great importance. The Canadian system perpetuates anti-Black racism today and Canadians participated in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Examples of ongoing anti-Black racism are described within this report. They are remnants of unaddressed Canadian cultural biases against Black people.

## **Participation in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade**

Canadians owned enslaved Black people from the 1600s to 1834. In 1799 for example, Torontonians William Jarvis owned 6 enslaved Black people while he was the Provincial Secretary of Upper Canada. Other government and military officials, merchants, fur traders, tavern and hotel keepers, millers, tradesmen, bishops, priests, and nuns also owned enslaved Black people <sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>The Canadian Encyclopedia, Natasha Henry: Black Enslavement in Canada - 2020

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