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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

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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 ¹.

¹The Canadian Encyclopedia, Natasha Henry: Black Enslavement in Canada - 2020

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