



NATIVE RIGHTS

An Indigenous View on #BlackLivesMatter

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I was reminded over and over this week that black and indigenous communities of struggle are deeply connected through our experiences with colonialism, oppression, and white supremacy.

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Like many others, I watched the live stream of St. Louis County Prosecutor Robert McCulloch delivering what was clearly a public relations campaign, justifying the grand jury's decision not to indict

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I have seen an expression of tremendous black love for children and family.

Although few were surprised by the decision, McCulloch's orchestrated performance contributed to the systemic expression of anti-blackness that began on Turtle Island, when African people were violently stolen from their indigenous homelands and brought by white people to ours. It is an anti-blackness intrinsically linked to the genocide, white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, and colonialism used to maintain the dispossession of indigenous people from our homelands on Turtle Island and to erase our bodies from society. That anti-blackness is just as real and alive in Canada as it is in the United States.

As black communities respond to the Ferguson decision in cities across the United States this week, their rage resonates with me in a familiar way because it comes from a similar place as my own. On the streets that night and in the days that have followed, rage.

I have seen an expression of tremendous black love for children and family, a tremendous black love for culture, body and people, coupled with a tremendous outrage against a colonial system that is designed at its core to destroy black and indigenous love. This same fertile ground birthed the so-called "Oka Crisis" and the Idle No More movement. This same ground compels the ongoing resistance of indigenous women and Two Spirit people—an indigenous term for queer or LGBT people—to all forms of colonial gendered violence.

Amid the mainstream media's coverage of these events, it seems difficult for Canadian and American society to see that love and rage are justified—to see indigenous and black people as fully human. I am repeatedly told that I cannot be angry if I want transformative change —that the expression of anger and rage as emotions are wrong

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message in such statements is that we, as indigenous and black

people, are not allowed to express a full range of human emotions.

We are encouraged to suppress responses that are not deemed palatable or respectable to settler society.

But the correct emotional response to violence targeting our families is rage.

Policing in Turtle Island was born of the need to suppress black and indigenous resistance to colonialism and slavery.

We have survived 400 years of racialized, gendered violence designed to remove us from our lands and assimilate us into the colonizer's agenda. The idea that we should all remain positive and calm, while 1,200 indigenous women and girls are disappeared in Canada, while black people are gunned down in the streets by white police officers, security guards, and vigilantes every 28 hours, while the legal system will not even provide a trial to the perpetrators of violence, is unfathomable.

I've asked myself more than once this week, why is there more outrage in American and Canadian societies over property damage than toward the state-sanctioned violence that is normalized in the everyday lives of indigenous and black people? I believe that our lives matter more than a burned police car, even if the state and other narratives do not.

I was reminded over and over this week that black and indigenous communities of struggle are deeply connected through our experiences with colonialism, oppression, and white supremacy. Indigenous and black people are disproportionately attacked and targeted by the state, and, in fact, policing in Turtle Island was born of the need to suppress and oppress black and indigenous resistance to colonialism and slavery.

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communities and targeted by four centuries of gendered violence, while black queer and indigenous Two-Spirit communities are targets of multiple sites of oppression, violence, and erasure. Black and indigenous children have been stolen from their families throughout colonial history through the institutions of slavery, and in Canada the residential schools and the child welfare system. We are interconnected through systems of oppression that would prefer us not to exist unless it can exploit us as commodities for labor.

In both of our communities of struggle, however, youth are brilliant leaders in resistance and resurgence. The work of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network and the Dream Defenders—just two of many for-youth, by-youth organizations—remind me to nurture our relationships to each other by creating decolonizing constellations of resistance and love as a mechanism to ensure that we are no longer complacent in the oppression of each other. These young leaders are showing us through their lives that, by collaborating with each other, we can build collective power and grow mutually caring communities of support and resistance.

I have a responsibility to center and amplify black voices.

I was also reminded that my liberation as an indigenous woman is linked to the liberation of black women and the Two Spirit and queer community, and I've learned by listening to black feminists like Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Luam Kidane, and Hawa Y. Mire that resurgent indigenous and black feminisms are the spine of our collective liberation.

The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter is “an online platform developed after the murder of Trayvon Martin, designed to connect people interested in learning more about and fighting back against anti-black racism,” according to the three black queer women who created it:

AKA G. B. C. H. I. J. K. L. M. N. O. P. Q. R. S. T. U. V. W. X. Y. Z.

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because it is a reminder that in the face of a system that seeks to also erase us, #IndigenousLivesMatter too.

To me, Ferguson is a call not only to indict the system but to decolonize the systems that create and maintain the forces of indigenous genocide and anti-blackness. I have a responsibility to make space on my land for those communities of struggles, to center and amplify black voices, and to co-resist.

We both come from vibrant, proud histories of mobilization and protest, and it is the sacrifices of our elders and our ancestors that ensured that our communities of struggle continue to exist today. They believed in their hearts that there is no justice and no peace until we are all free, and so must we.

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