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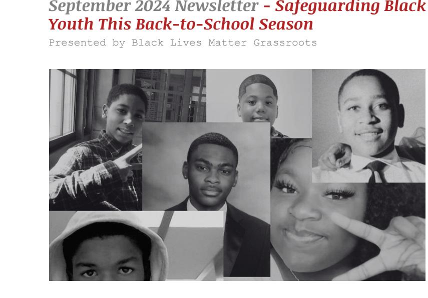
BLACK LIVES MATTER GRASSROOTS

September 2024 Newsletter - *Safeguarding Black Youth This Back-to-School Season*

Presented by Black Lives Matter Grassroots



Welcome to the inaugural edition of our Black Lives Matter Grassroots newsletter! This publication is born out of a deep commitment to amplifying the incredible work being done by our chapters across the nation and the powerful impact we're making together on the ground. Each month, we'll bring you stories of resilience, resistance, and progress, uplifting the struggles and celebrating the victories that move us closer to justice.

In this first issue, we're focusing on the back-to-school season and the crucial need to keep our students safe. You'll hear from on-the-ground organizers, student activists, chapters, and Justice Families - including the mother of #TylerLewis, as they share their experiences and insights. Beyond these important offerings, our goal is to provide valuable resources that spark and empower effective organizing for transformative change. Whether it's through local actions, national efforts, or global fights for justice, this newsletter is a gateway to stay connected and active in the fight for Black liberation. Thank you for being a part of the journey.

Calls to Action

— **DONATE** to support our work to end state-sanctioned violence and fund scholarships for Black youth dedicated to the fight for justice.

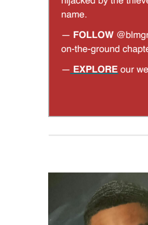
— **APPLY TO START A CHAPTER** and bring the movement to your region.

— **CONTACT** the Rapid Response Team for urgent issues related to police and/or white-supremacist violence at (323) 377-7952.

— **COMMENT & UNFOLLOW** @blklivesmatter, the social media handle that was hijacked by the thieves that stole the movement's resources, platforms, and good name.

— **FOLLOW** @blmgrassroots for the real work of the movement and the 39 boots-on-the-ground chapters across the nation.

— **EXPLORE** our website for more ways to become involved.



Justice in the Name of - #TylerLewis

It was October 2019 and Tyler Lewis had recently returned to Buffalo State University for his sophomore year. Tyler was just 19, a bright-eyed young man brimming with promise. He was the embodiment of love, raised in a home where warmth, wisdom, and care were the foundations of his upbringing. His parents, who poured every ounce of their being into nurturing him, saw in Tyler the fulfillment of their hopes and dreams. He was smart, funny, and handsome—a young man whose ambitions were as vast as his heart was kind. He was the kind of son every parent dreams of—dedicated to his studies, loyal to his friends, and committed to making a difference in the world.

At the university, Tyler thrived, excelling academically, forming friendships, and finding love. His mother, Roquisha Lewis, proudly recalls his gratitude for the opportunities she provided, acknowledging the sacrifices she made for his education.

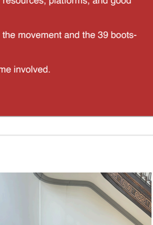
However, Tyler's life was violently cut short. He was deceived by a group of young men who lured him into a situation across town at University at Buffalo that would prove deadly. Tyler was stabbed to death by a white drug dealer, the killing never fully investigated, records sealed, no explanation or support to the Lewis family, and no apologies from the universities involved. Despite multiple witnesses and evidence, the universities involved—University at Buffalo and Buffalo State—have done little to pursue justice. The District Attorney at the time, John Flynn, refused to charge anyone or release the name of Tyler's killer.

Roquisha Lewis, Tyler's mother, has been relentless in her pursuit of justice, refusing to let her son's story be buried by a system that criminalizes Black people. The truth of Tyler's innocence is clear, yet the criminal legal system continues to commit a "double murder," assassinating Tyler's character after his life has already been stolen, by portraying him as a criminal, reinforcing a narrative that dehumanizes and oppresses Black boys.

Black Lives Matter Grassroots has been working with the Lewis family from the beginning to demand answers and accountability. Last October, BLM Grassroots chapters from around the country - led by BLM Buffalo - descended on Buffalo, New York, engaging in on campus awareness campaigns and staging a sit-in at the District Attorney's office. The DA fled, but his deputies committed to have the name of the perpetrator unsealed; a year later and that still has not happened. District Attorney Flynn stepped down and is now working in private practice.

The fight for justice in Tyler's name is not just about his case; it is about challenging the system that dictates whose lives matter. Tyler Lewis could be anyone's son or friend, and his loss demands that we fight for his truth.

To support Roquisha Lewis and the fight for justice for Tyler Lewis, you can follow the campaign on social media at @Justice4TylerLewis and sign the petition at: Reopen Buffalo Student Tyler Lewis' Murder Case.



Organizer Spotlight - Deja Marie Joseph

The Black Lives Matter Grassroots Youth Vanguard is a dynamic group of young activists fighting for racial justice and systemic change. This youth-led initiative amplifies young voices, providing a platform for organizing and connecting with others who share their passion and commitment. The Youth Vanguard is at the forefront of the movement, advocating for issues that directly impact their communities, from police violence to educational equity. Among these young leaders is Deja Marie Joseph, a 20-year-old junior at Howard University, whose journey with the BLM Grassroots Youth Vanguard is both poignant and powerful.

Deja was thrust into activism at age 10 when her her 14-year-old brother, #AndrewJosephIII's life was stolen by Hillsborough County sheriffs in Tampa, Florida. "Losing my brother made me realize the urgency of this fight," Deja shares. "I needed to channel my grief and anger into something meaningful, and that's how I found the BLM Grassroots Youth Vanguard."

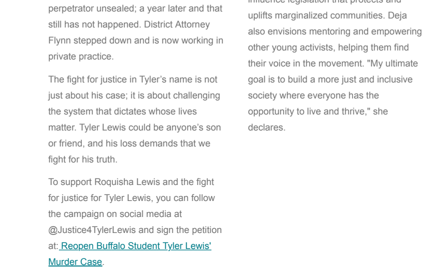
For Deja, the Youth Vanguard became more than just a space for activism; it became a community where she could connect with other young activists who shared similar experiences. Her involvement has provided an outlet to advocate for justice, not just for her brother, but for all those impacted by systemic racism and violence.

One of Deja's most significant contributions has been her involvement in national campaigns that raise awareness about police violence and advocate for school safety. "I've been able to connect with other students and share my story," Deja explains. "We successfully pushed for changes in school policies, creating safer environments for children to grow and thrive."

Deja is one of 14 Youth Vanguard members from around the country who was awarded a scholarship from BLM Grassroots, which has provided her with the financial support to continue her education at Howard University, where she is an honor roll student. "The scholarship has been a game-changer for me," Deja says. "It has allowed me to fully engage in my coursework and extracurricular activities, knowing that I have the support to pursue my dreams."

Looking ahead, Deja plans to continue advocating for racial justice and police accountability, both within the BLM movement and beyond. She hopes to pursue a career in public relations and policy, where she can use her skills to influence legislation that protects and uplifts marginalized communities. Deja also envisions mentoring and empowering other young activists, helping them find their voice in the movement. "My ultimate goal is to build a more just and inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to live and thrive," she declares.

Black Lives Matter Grassroots Supports Renewed Campus Protests to Demand an Arms Embargo and a Free Palestine as Fall Semester Begins



Over the last 11 months, Palestine has experienced a complete scholasticide, with Israeli forces targeting Palestinian educational institutions and infrastructures as a means of erasing Palestinian futures and identities.

Black Lives Matter Grassroots stands unwaveringly with the Palestinian people, and students around the world who dare to put their bodies and futures on the line to demand a U.S. arms embargo against Israel and a #FreePalestine.

This past Spring, students and community members around the globe erected encampments demanding that colleges and universities disclose their investments and divest from Israeli companies and partnerships. As the new academic year commences and we approach the 2024 Presidential election, these calls will intensify.

Many of these student protests have been met with intimidation, encampment raids, repression, suspensions, expulsions, arrests, and outright violence from police and zionists. Students and community members have suffered major injury to their bodies at the hands of police and zionist operatives during these raids and arrests. Additionally, universities around the nation are rolling out draconian policies that ban student protests, encampments, and other forms of peaceful demonstration. The University of California and California State University systems have recently issued directives banning encampments, limiting free speech, and barring facial coverings reflecting their increasingly repressive stance against student activism. New York University has designated "zionist" as a protected class, equating the oppressive ideology with racial, gender, and religious identities. These actions signal a declaration of war against student activism nationwide.

As students return to campuses there comes the likelihood of additional protests. We can expect continued calls for disclosure and divestment of university resources from Israel, and also the end of all ties with weapons manufacturers and warmongering corporations that often come to campuses to recruit students into their workforces. Rather than ban protests, condemn student and community activists, and threaten retaliation and harm, university administrators should take a class themselves on the history and effectiveness of righteous student protests. Student protests, activism, and organizing is now celebrated for its role in expanding voting rights, winning ethnic studies, ending de jure segregation, bringing an end to the war in Vietnam, and toppling Apartheid in South Africa. Students have always been on the frontlines of the Black Lives Matter movement and student organizing will continue to play a pivotal role in ending the genocide and winning a free Palestine.

Universities must ask themselves whether they stand on the side of war profiteers or on the side of the students and communities they profess to serve. Black Lives Matter Grassroots is with the students, communities, freedom fighters, and lovers of peace, and is committed to standing and organizing in solidarity.

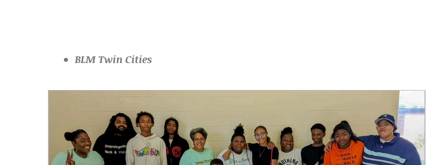
Chapter Spotlight

In this section, we spotlight the impactful work being done by our 39 official BLM Grassroots chapters and 43 formations. From innovative community programs to powerful advocacy efforts, these highlights showcase the dedication and resilience of our members in driving meaningful change. Explore chapters and friends are making a difference in their communities and beyond.

- *BLM Buffalo*

The BLM Buffalo chapter is working on an innovative initiative to engage youth by leveraging entertainment and talent to capture their attention, build community, and channel their energy toward positive personal and community-wide expression. One of the key programs, inspired by Nick Cannon's Wild 'N Out, aims to create a fun and interactive environment where teens can showcase their talents in a supportive setting. The program, scheduled for this month, is slated to become a recurring event. The chapter faces challenges in gathering youth together, so they are focusing on collaborating with groups that can connect them with the children who would benefit most from this initiative.

- *BLM Twin Cities*

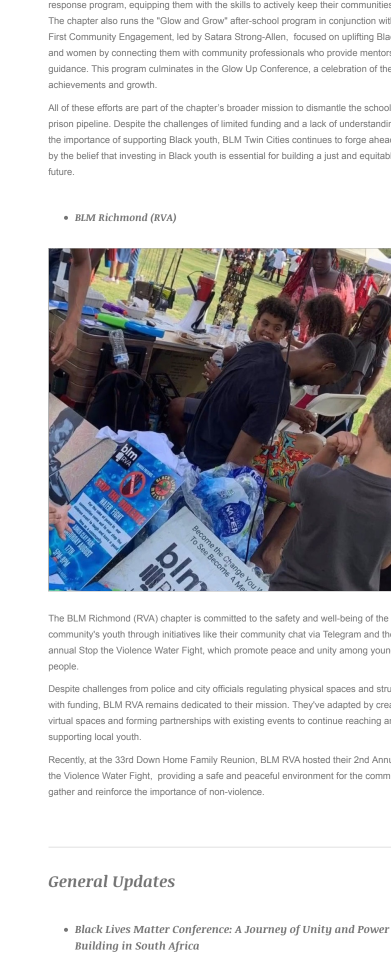


Black Lives Matter - Twin Cities is deeply committed to empowering Black youth through several impactful initiatives. Recently, the chapter successfully advocated for the inclusion of Afrocentric stories in the Saint Paul school board's curriculum for K-5 students, ensuring that Black children have a safe and culturally affirming space to meet academic standards without the burden of white supremacist culture. The chapter also organized an HBCU tour, taking 25 Minnesota youth to visit Hampton, Norfolk State, and Howard University, exposing them to higher education opportunities steeped in Black excellence.

In addition to educational initiatives, BLM Twin Cities is training youth for a new community response program, equipping them with the skills to actively keep their communities safe. The chapter also runs the "Glow and Grow" after-school program in conjunction with Love First Community Engagement, led by Satara Strong-Allen, focused on uplifting Black girls and women by connecting them with community professionals who provide mentorship and guidance. This program culminates in the Glow Up Conference, a celebration of their achievements and growth.

All of these efforts are part of the chapter's broader mission to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. Despite the challenges of limited funding and a lack of understanding about the importance of supporting Black youth, BLM Twin Cities continues to forge ahead, driven by the belief that investing in Black youth is essential for building a just and equitable future.

- *BLM Richmond (RVA)*



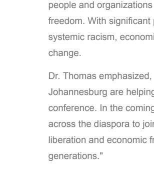
The BLM Richmond (RVA) chapter is committed to the safety and well-being of the community's youth through initiatives like their community chat via Telegram and the annual Stop the Violence Water Fight, which promote peace and unity among young people.

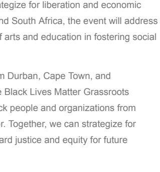
Despite challenges from police and city officials regulating physical spaces and struggles with funding, BLM RVA remains dedicated to their mission. They've adapted by creating virtual spaces and forming partnerships with existing events to continue reaching and supporting local youth.

Recently, at the 33rd Down Home Family Reunion, BLM RVA hosted their 2nd Annual Stop the Violence Water Fight, providing a safe and peaceful environment for the community to gather and reinforce the importance of non-violence.

General Updates

- *Black Lives Matter Conference: A Journey of Unity and Power Building in South Africa*

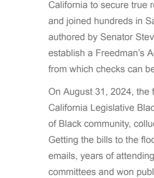


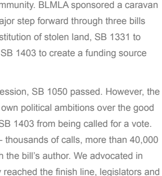


Rev. Dr. James Thomas, NAACP President for the San Fernando Valley, Cal State LA Professor, and co-founder of Clergy for Black Lives, traveled to South Africa for the second time this summer to build solidarity. Through the relationships forged by Dr. Thomas with students, faculty, and community, Black Lives Matter Grassroots is preparing for our first international conference at the University of Zululand. This conference aims to unite Black people and organizations across the diaspora to strategize for liberation and economic freedom. With significant political shifts in the U.S. and South Africa, the event will address systemic racism, economic inequality, and the role of arts and education in fostering social change.

Dr. Thomas emphasized, "The insights gathered from Durban, Cape Town, and Johannesburg are helping to shape the vision for the Black Lives Matter Grassroots conference. In the coming months, we will invite Black people and organizations from across the diaspora to join us in this crucial endeavor. Together, we can strategize for liberation and economic freedom, forging a path toward justice and equity for future generations."

- *SB1050 and the Cost of Betrayal*



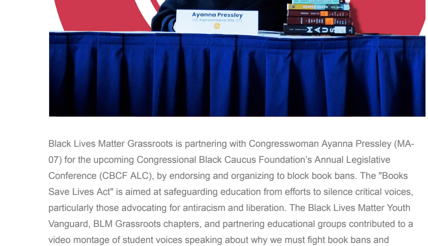


Black Lives Matter Grassroots is collaborating with other reparations advocacy groups in California to secure true reparative justice for our community. BLMLA sponsored a caravan and joined hundreds in Sacramento, hopeful for a major step forward through three bills authored by Senator Steve Bradford: SB 1050 for restitution of stolen land, SB 1331 to establish a Freedman's Agency for reparations, and SB 1403 to create a funding source from which checks can be cut to Black people.

On August 31, 2024, the final day of the legislative session, SB 1050 passed. However, the California Legislative Black Caucus, prioritizing their own political ambitions over the good of Black community, colluded to block SB 1331 and SB 1403 from being called for a vote. Getting the bills to the floor took years of organizing - thousands of calls, more than 40,000 emails, years of attending hearings, and working with the bill's author. We advocated in committees and won public support. When we finally reached the finish line, legislators and a "liberal" Governor who threatened a veto, betrayed Black people. They must face political consequences.

It ain't over! Black Lives Matter Grassroots will continue to work towards real reparations in California and beyond, along with coalition partners in the Coalition for a Just and Equitable California, AfricaTown Coalition, and courageous reparations advocates like Los Angeles Reparations Commissioner "Friday" Jones. To support our reparations work in California, please contact Jan Williams at jayrachel.will@gmail.com.

- *Standing Against Book Bans at CBCF ALC*



Black Lives Matter Grassroots is partnering with Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (MA-07) for the upcoming Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Annual Legislative Conference (CBCF ALC), by endorsing and organizing to block book bans. The "Books Save Lives Act" is aimed at safeguarding education from efforts to silence critical voices, particularly those advocating for antiracism and liberation. The Black Lives Matter Youth Vanguard, BLM Grassroots chapters, and partnering educational groups contributed to a video montage of student voices speaking about why we must fight book bans and organize for liberated educational models.

BLM Grassroots organizers will also be present throughout the entire conference week to share information about our critical work, including the "Ending Qualified Immunity" Act and "Wakiesha's Law" requiring family notification for those harmed or killed in police custody, jails, or prisons.

Tune in - All BLM Media Resources

- Move the Crowd airs every Monday morning at 7AM on 90.7FM KPFK in Los Angeles and worldwide at kpfk.org. Listener calls around 7:40 at 818-985-5735.
- Tune in to BLM's This Is Not a Drill! every Saturday 8-10AM, on KBLA Talk 1580 in Los Angeles, kbla1580.com, on facebook.com/blmla, and available wherever you get your podcasts..
- Tune into Fli-City Blackout presented by our very own DeWaun Robinson of Black Lives Matter Grassroots Flint on YouTube @fli-cityblackout

Black Lives Matter is truly a labor of love, and our work produces real expenses. To support our work, please donate here.

For the most updated information and more on our work, please visit our website at http://blmgrassroots.org and follow us on social media: @blmgrassroots on IG, @blmgrassroots on Twitter, and Black Lives Matter Grassroots on Facebook.

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