

# 101 Dewson Street

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A HUB OF BLACK 2SLGBTQIA+ ACTIVISM IN CANADA



LE CENTRE CANADIEN DE LA  
**DIVERSITÉ DES GENRES**  
+ DE LA **SEXUALITÉ**

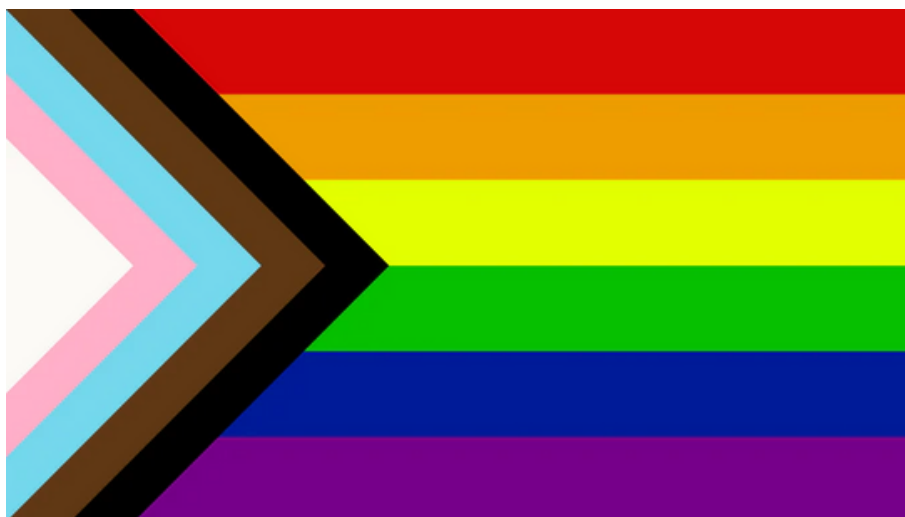


THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR  
**GENDER+SEXUAL**  
**DIVERSITY**



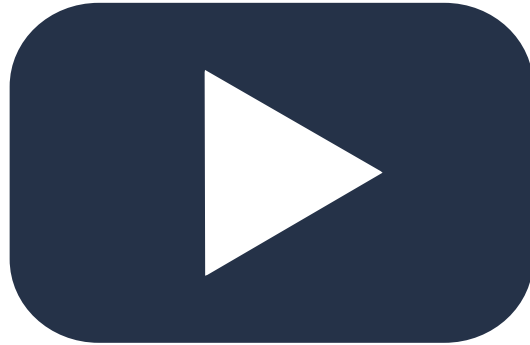
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Please follow the steps to complete the zone:

- 1) Watch the video
- 2) Read through the booklet contents
- 3) Answer the discussion questions as a group

**Content warning**

*Racial, sexual and gender-based discrimination, violence,  
homophobia, racism, police brutality.*

During the **Liberation era** of the 1970s-1990s, Toronto was a hub of 2SLGBTQIA+ activism. However, Black and **Afro-Caribbean** members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community had an especially difficult time finding activist and community spaces that would support and accept them.

Black 2SLGBTQIA+ groups were formed as a response to **racism** within the broader 2SLGBTQIA+ community and mainstream Canadian society, as well as **homophobia** and **heterosexism** within the greater Black and Caribbean communities in Toronto.

These new groups and community spaces catered to the unique needs and goals of the Black 2SLGBTQIA+ community.



Pictured above: Junior Harrison (left) and Douglas Stewart (right) march with the organization, Gay Men of African Descent.



The heart of Black 2SLGBTQIA+ activism in Toronto at this time was the **101 Dewson Street Collective**.

Lesbian couple, Makeda Silvera and Stephanie Martin, purchased the house at 101 Dewson Street with the intention of making it a place of meeting for queer Black folks and **people of colour (POC)**. They hoped to create a space for isolated youths that had been displaced from their homes or were in need of community.

The 101 Dewson Street Collective became a hub of activism within the 2SLGBTQIA+ Black and POC communities. It was the birthplace of several pivotal organizations, but also an important space of friendship, family, acceptance, celebration, and love.



Pictured above: Owners of 101 Dewson Street and founders of Sister Vision Press, Makeda Silvera (left) and Stephanie Martin(right).



Pictured above, from left to right: Dionne Falconer, Courtney McFarlane, Douglas Stewart, Angela Robertson, and Junior Harrison. Pictured below: Debbie Douglas.



Debbie Douglas was one of the residents at the 101 Dewson Street Collective and she described it as a place of “living, organizing, partying, arguing, and coming into our own.” 101 Dewson frequently hosted parties, celebrations, movie nights, and there was a constant influx of new faces and old friends.

Courtney McFarlane—another resident of 101 Dewson—explained that '101' as they called it, was a Black **queer** home but it was also an important site of organizing and activism. The 1988 International Lesbian and Gay People of Colour Conference (ILGAPOC) was planned from 101 Dewson Street and Canada's first Black 2SLGBTQIA+ organization, Zami, was conceptualized over conversations at 101 Dewson's kitchen table.



# Zami

Zami was founded in 1984 by roommates at 101 Dewson, Debbie Douglas and Douglas Stewart. Douglas and Stewart wanted to create a political space that centred 2SLGBTQIA+ folks within the Black community.

*Zami* is a Creole word used in the Eastern Caribbean to refer to lesbian sex in a derogatory way. Calling the organization, Zami, was then a reclamation of the word and a connection to the heritage and culture of many of its members.

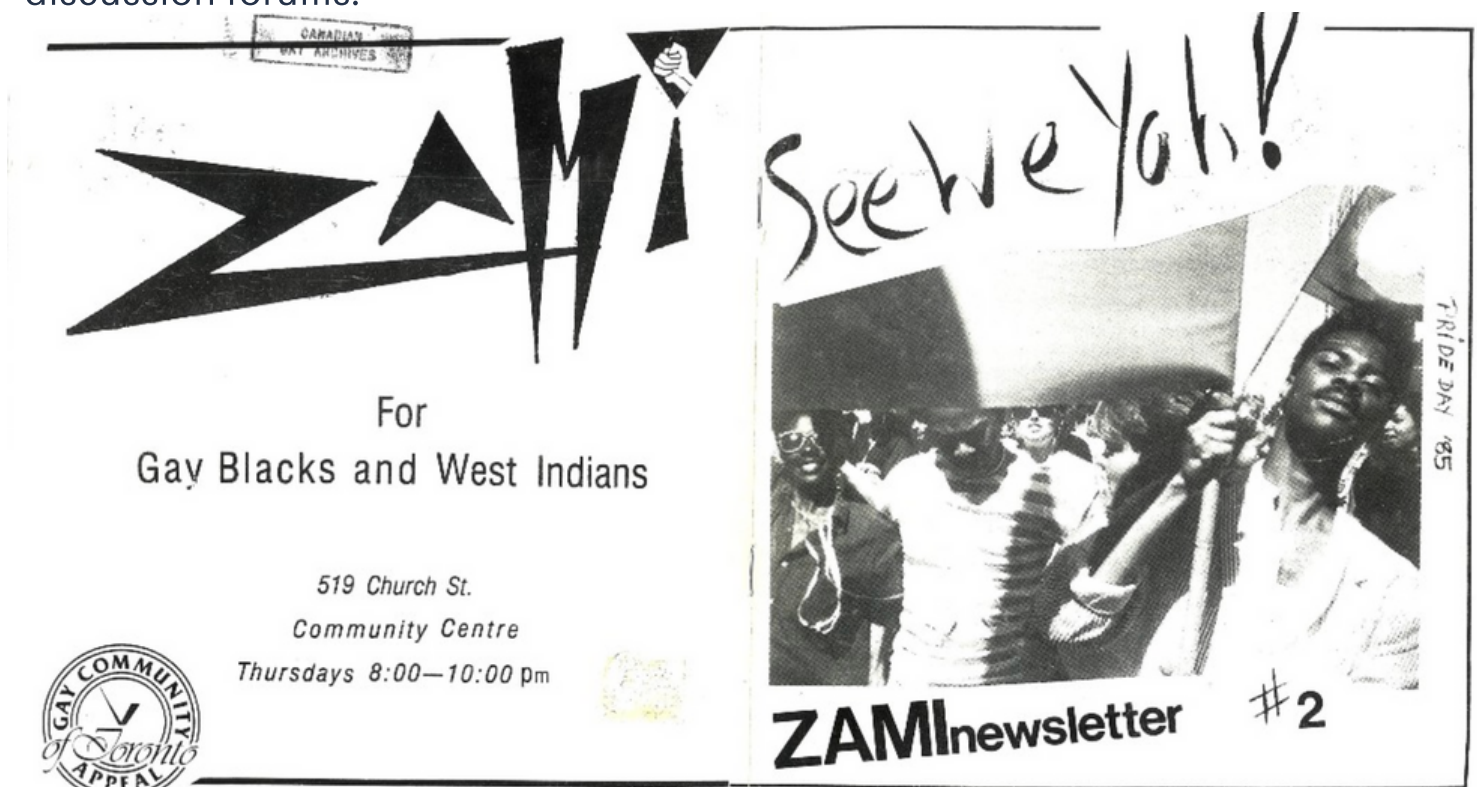
*Zami* is also the title of a 1982 book by the prominent Black lesbian feminist writer, Audre Lorde. Lorde's essays, poems, and books have made important contributions to feminist and race studies. Debbie Douglas and Douglas Stewart were inspired by Lorde's work when naming Zami.



Zami advertised their events using flyers, phone calls, and word-of-mouth. They had potluck dinners and parties, such as Zami's Colour Purple party that was sometimes held at Dewson Street or **the 519** community centre (pictured above).

When Douglas and Stewart first formed Zami, they tried to place an ad in *Contrast* magazine—a prominent Black community newspaper—and were ridiculed. The publishers refused to run an ad that was for the gay and lesbian community. Douglas and Stewart were forced to publish ads in mainstream gay and lesbian newspapers and magazines, but these publications were predominantly white. They had less of a focus on Black folks and their unique experiences and in some cases were outwardly racist.

An example of the everyday instances of racism faced by Black members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community was when, in 1985, *The Body Politic*—one of the most popular gay and lesbian magazines—published a classified ad placed by a white gay man looking for a “Black houseboy.” In response, Zami partnered with Gay Asians Toronto (GAT) to challenge the magazine, write an article about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and race, and create their own panels and discussion forums.



Zami paved the way for other 2SLGBTQIA+ Black and POC activist groups such as Sepia, Lesbians of Colour (LOC), Young Ebony Sisters, AYA, Black Lesbian and Gay Action Group, Simon Nkoli Anti-Apartheid Committee and the Gay and Lesbian AIDS Discussion Group (GLAD).



# Black CAP

When the **HIV/AIDS epidemic** began in the 1980s, 2SLGBTQIA+ Black activists recognized a lack of resources about HIV prevention, and support for Black folks living with HIV. The Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP), co-founded by Douglas Stewart and Camille Orridge, was formed to address this need.

Black CAP is still operational today and they continue to educate about HIV/AIDS and safer sex practices, as well as break down stereotypes and taboos related to **sexuality** and **sexual orientation**.

**BLACK WOMEN  
GET AIDS TOO!**



WENDI MODESTE

**THE BLACK COALITION  
FOR AIDS PREVENTION**  
**PRESENTS**

WENDI MODESTE, A Black, Heterosexual, HIV+ Woman at a Public Forum  
on Thursday, September 19<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m. at 1621 Dupont, West of Lansdowne  
(Jamaican -Canadian Association)

• Child Care Available • Interpreted for the Deaf • Refreshments on Sale  
Opening Speaker: Carolann Wright – Community Health Outreach Worker W.H.I.W.H.\*  
(The Community Health Centre for Women)

**CO-SPONSORED BY:**

* WOMEN'S HEALTH IN WOMEN'S HANDS	WOMEN & AIDS PROJECT (A.C.T.)	DEAF OUTREACH PROJECT (A.C.T.)	CONGRESS OF BLACK WOMEN (TORONTO CHAPTER)	C.I.U.T. RADIO
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**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: 971-7588**



Douglas Stewart (pictured left) was a co-founder of Black CAP and their first Executive Director. Dionne Falconer (pictured right) succeeded Stewart as Black CAP's second Executive Director.

# NATIONAL CONGRESS OF BLACK WOMEN

The Canadian Negro Women's Association

APRIL 6th-8th 1973

Westbury Hotel

Often, Black 2SLGBTQIA+ groups debated about their standpoint. Douglas Stewart explained that at Zami they faced the question of whether they were a queer group in the Black community, or a Black group in the queer community. Ultimately, they settled on the first: a queer group in the Black community.

This position meant that Zami prioritized political issues that affected the Black community as a whole, while also working towards acceptance and representation of Black 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples within the Black community.

Black 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations often worked as part of a coalition with other Black activist groups, such as the Black Youth Hotline and Reunite African Youth (RAY), the Congress of Black Women of Canada, Black Women's Collective, Black Action Defence Committee and many others.

As a coalition, they were working towards **Black liberation**, additional resources and representation for the Black community, and an end to systemic racism and **police brutality**.



# Fighting Police Brutality

In 1988, Sherona Hall, Dudley Laws, Charlie Roach, Akua Benjamin, Lennox Farrell, Numvoyo and Brian Hyman, Akilah and Dari Meade and others formed the Black Action Defence Committee (BADC) to coordinate protest and action in response to the police shooting of Lester Donaldson in August of that year. The BADC pushed for police reform as well as the creation of special investigative units to review instances of police violence.

Many of the Black 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations in Toronto worked to support the BADC's actions to stop police violence. An example of the overlap between these activist streams is the Black Women's Collective (BWC) of Toronto. Many of the BWC's founding members were also part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, members of Zami, and part of the 101 Dewson Street Collective.

They wrote statements, letters, and petitions addressing systemic racism and planned demonstrations that highlighted and resisted police violence against Black folks in Canada.



Pictured above and below are buttons calling for justice for two victims of police violence in Canada. In 1988, the Ontario police shot 17 year-old, Michael Wade Lawson, in his hometown of Mississauga, and in 1979, the Metropolitan Toronto Police killed Albert Johnson in his home.

32 activist groups from the Black community organized a protest in response, and 2000 protesters marched in front of the 13th Division of the Toronto police.





Many of the Black 2SLGBTQIA+ activist and community groups formed during the Liberation era paved the way for current Black activism in Canada. The struggle continues as Black activists still fight for an end to police brutality and systemic racism.

The actions of the BADC in response to the police shootings of Lester Donaldson (1988), Michael Wade Lawson (1988), Sophia Cook (1989), Marlon Neal (1990), and Raymond Lawrence (1992), as well as subsequent work by various Black community organizations, set precedent for the demonstrations led by Black Lives Matter (BLM) Toronto. In 2015, BLM Toronto called for justice for Andrew Loku and Jermaine Carby—another two Canadian victims of police brutality. These BLM Toronto protests were also in the wake of BLM protests across the United States in response to teenager Mike Brown's death at the hands of police in Ferguson.



In 2016, BLM Toronto was invited to be the honoured group at Toronto's Pride Parade and lead the procession. BLM Toronto used this opportunity to call attention to the unique threat they continued to face as Black 2SLGBTQIA+ folks in Canada by stopping the parade. One of their demands—to remove police floats from the parade—continued the historical activism of Black 2SLGBTQIA+ folks demanding simultaneously for Black and Queer Liberation.

Professor Rinaldo Walcott explains that BLM Toronto "has returned us to a political moment that Black people used to have where we collectively organized" and that BLM Toronto exemplifies a "collective care." This collective care recognizes the diversity of Black folks all facing similar threats and supports and connects them in the fight for racial justice.





**Liberation Era** was a time period in North American history where various social groups were campaigning for political and social rights and freedoms. Activists in this time believed in liberation, or the act of freeing human potential that has been hindered by society's values and organization. Some prominent communities campaigning in this era were the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, women, and racialized folks.

**Afro-Caribbean** is an ethnicity that refers to people from the Caribbean with ancestral connection to Africa. The Caribbean is composed of the string of islands separating the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean sea, some of which include the Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Jamaica, Cuba, and Turks and Caicos. Afro-Caribbean specifically refers to people from the Caribbean with ancestry that traces back to Africa. Afro-Caribbean people are part of the African diaspora—dispersed from their native land as the result of the historical, colonial transatlantic slave trade that forcibly brought Africans to the Caribbean islands as slaves.

**Racism** is prejudice directed towards someone as the result of their race or perceived race and reinforced by systems of power. This may include instances of judgement, verbal or physical abuse, threat of or use of violence, microaggressions (the use of small, daily insults or assumptions aimed towards people based on their affiliation with an oppressed or marginalized group), denial of rights, resources, or services, exclusion from institutions, the use of historically derogatory racially-charged language, the use of racial stereotypes, or the wearing of cultural regalia and impersonation of those from a particular race by those who are not a part of said race or cultural group. Racism is also a systemic issue, meaning that it affects all systems within society from education, to health care, to government.

**Homophobia** is the hatred of homosexuality exhibited in ways such as prejudice, discrimination, or violence. Anyone who is not “straight” (or is assumed not to be) can be the target of homophobia.

**Heterosexism** is prejudice and discrimination in favour of heterosexuality. This includes the presumption of heterosexuality as the superior and more desirable form of attraction.

**People of Colour (POC)** is an umbrella term referring to those of non-white or non-European ancestry or cultural heritage, those who are visibly racialized, and those who face instances of direct and indirect oppression as the result of their race. The term is meant to encompass all those who are non-white and has, for instance, included those of Asian, Indigenous, and Latinx descent in addition to those of Black or African descent. The term POC is widely debated and has been criticized for its erasure of those of specific races or ethnicities and their associated realities. As a result, the term has also been adapted to BIPOC—Black, Indigenous, and people of colour—in order to place emphasis on the particular oppression faced by Black and Indigenous peoples when compared to others who may identify as POC but benefit from privilege as the result of their skin colour or physical appearance and/or the particular historical and societal circumstances associated with their race or culture.

**The 519** is a community centre located at 519 Church Street West in Toronto. The 519 provides a variety of community resources such as support, reference to health care, legal aid and more to 2SLGBTQIA+ people. Created in 1975, the 519 has been an influential part of 2SLGBTQIA+ community organizing in Toronto.

**The Body Politic** was one of the most popular gay publications in Canada. It was a monthly magazine published from 1971 to 1987 and was created by a collective operated out of the 2SLGBTQIA+ bookstore in Toronto, Glad Day Bookshop.



**HIV/AIDS epidemic** was the outbreak of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), as well as an advanced stage of HIV—acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)—during the 1980s. During the epidemic, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community were disproportionately affected and died of AIDS-related complications in large numbers. Although HIV may be transmitted or acquired by those of all sexual orientations and gender identities, HIV/AIDS is often associated with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. In the 1980s, anti-2SLGBTQIA+ sentiment and homophobia meant that 2SLGBTQIA+ people living with HIV/AIDS were neglected and ignored as well as systematically denied access to funds and resources by the government. As a result, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community formed their own organizations and clinics to treat, prevent, and educate about HIV/AIDS. Those living with HIV have historically faced and continue to face stigma and misconception surrounding HIV/AIDS and how it is transmitted. HIV continues to affect people around the world, and while there is still no cure for HIV, there are various effective treatments and preventative measures, and many individuals live healthy and happy lives with HIV.

**Sexuality** is the way that humans interpret and experience sexual desires, attractions, and feelings. Sexuality encompasses historic, physical, biological, emotional, mental, and spiritual practices and behaviours associated with sex.

**Sexual orientation** is a term used to describe the direction of a person's physical attraction. It is not a set of absolute categories, but commonly used terms include gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, and pansexual orientations, among others.

**Queer** is an umbrella term for a social/intellectual/political movement that seeks to encompass a broad range of sexual identities, behaviours, and expressions. It has also been reclaimed as a personal identity for some, after its historical use as a homophobic and transphobic slur. However, not all individuals are comfortable with the reclamation of the word, and it should not be used to describe someone without their consent. It is sometimes used as a catch-all for the rainbow community, and may or may not be seen to include trans people.

**Black Liberation** was a goal of Black and Civil Rights movements during the Liberation era and still today. Black Liberation challenges dominant codes of behaviour and action that privilege white people over Black and racialized people. Black Liberation calls for an end to systemic racism, white supremacy, police violence and brutality, limited visibility and representation of Black and racialized folks, objectification and racial prejudice among other goals. Black Liberation also demands the revision of existing structures in society such as government and education, to allow for the self-determination of Black folks and provision of basic needs, rights, and freedoms which they have been denied.

**Police brutality** is the unlawful and illegal use of force by a police officer against a civilian. The severity of police violence ranges and includes non-physical harassment such as intimidation and verbal abuse, as well as physical instances of assault, battery, torture, and murder. While anyone may be subject to police brutality, several groups of people are more vulnerable, including Black, Indigenous and other visibly racialized folks due to ingrained and systemic racism. Black Canadians and Americans have endured a long history of police brutality and violence evidenced in the many unjustified and illegal police shootings of unarmed Black folks. Police brutality is one of the primary points of change campaigned for by Black activists. Calls to end police brutality include investigation into instances of police violence by non-police run investigative bodies, the firing and arrest of police officers responsible for instances of violence, as well as the defunding of police and subsequent reallocation of police funding to other community services such as education and health care.

## Discussion Questions

- 1) Review Professor Rinaldo Walcott's idea of "collective care" discussed at the end of Page 9. How is collective care important for folks with intersectional identities as Black and queer? How might it relate to new movements such as #AllBlackLivesMatter?
- 2) Why do you think Zami decided that they were a queer group within the Black community and not a Black group within the queer community? How do you think this affected their priorities and strategies?
- 3) Compare the two images used on Page 9 of this booklet—the first is the 1988 demonstration in Toronto for Lester Donaldson and the second is a 2015 BLM Toronto protest for Andrew Loku and Jermaine Carby. How much has changed between these two time periods? How does this activism continue today?





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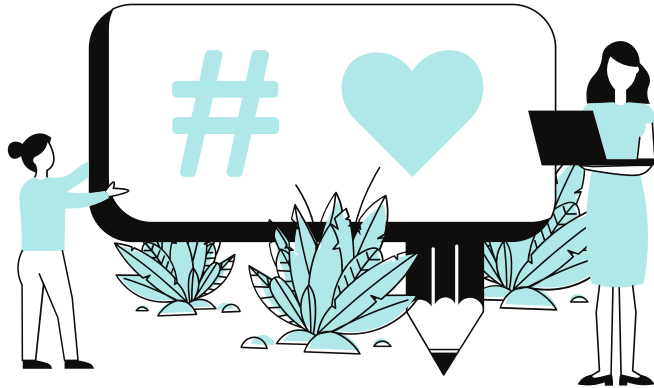
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