

Disability Solidarity

Completing the “Vision for Black Lives”

Harriet Tubman Collective

Alexis Toliver, Patricia Berne, Kylie Brooks, Neal Carter, Patrick Cokley, Candace Coleman, Dustin Gibson, Timothy Gordon Jr., Keri Gray, Christopher DeAngelo Huff, Cyree Jarelle Johnson, Lorrell D. Kilpatrick, Carolyn Lazard, Talila A. Lewis, Leroy F. Moore Jr., Vilissa Thompson, and Heather Watkins



The Harriet Tubman Collective is a group of Black Deaf and Disabled activists. Since its founding in the summer of 2016, we have fought against ableism, audism, and the other oppressive factors that affect the Black Deaf and Disabled communities. The Harriet Tubman Collective submits that any struggle against White supremacy must also address all of its interrelated flaws—including ableism and audism.



Abstract

On 07 September 2016, the Harriet Tubman Collective released its response to the “Vision for Black Lives” policy platform. The response, “Disability Solidarity: Completing the Vision for Black Lives,” addresses the erasure of Deaf/Disabled people from The Movement for Black Lives’s original platform.

Comprising no less than 20 percent of the US population, people with disabilities are the largest “minority” group in the nation.¹ And yet, in August 2016, the Movement for Black Lives released a groundbreaking policy platform outlining the vision for a just world for “all black people” that did not once mention

the unspeakable violence and Black death found at the intersection of disability, ableism, audism, and anti-Black racism.²

The six-point platform, which was supported or endorsed by more than fifty organizations from across the country, stated, in part:

“We believe in elevating the experiences and leadership of the most marginalized Black people. . . . We are intentional about amplifying the particular experience of state and gendered violence that Black queer, trans, gender nonconforming, women and intersex people face. There can be no liberation for all Black people if we do not center and fight for those who have been marginalized. It is our hope that by

Black communities must not overlook the plight of Black Disabled and Black Deaf communities in their pursuit of racial justice. The Movement’s work is wholly incomplete without an emphasis on disability. True liberation of all Black people cannot be achieved without the intentional centering of Black Disabled/Deaf narratives and leadership. No successful movement has existed without our leadership, and no movement will be successful without us.

Any movement that seeks to end police violence should work to undo racism and ableism and audism, which make Black Disabled/Deaf people prime targets for police violence. Darnell T. Wicker, a Black Deaf veteran, was killed by police officers in Louisville, Kentucky, on 08 August 2016.¹² Body camera footage shows officers shooting him multiple times seconds after issuing verbal orders. However, Wicker relied on speech reading to communicate. His family asserts that he likely never heard nor comprehended the officers.¹³

The circumstances of his death suggest that Darnell Wicker’s deafness and Blackness were both relevant to the officer’s perceptions of threat and use of force. Yet despite concerns about the influence of racial bias in his death, little mention was made of his deafness during actions taken in his name.¹⁴ This intersectional approach is lacking among national organizations, networks, and coalitions that claim to fight for racial justice, disability rights, and deaf rights. The absence of intersectionality leads to yet more Black, Deaf, and Disabled deaths in interactions with police.

ous and irresponsible to claim to seek justice for those who have died at the hands of police without naming victims’ disabilities or advancing disability issues. We demand a centering of the Black Disabled/Deaf and all of those names that the Movement uplifts while erasing and dishonoring part of their humanity:

Tanisha Anderson
Sandra Bland
Miriam Carey
Michelle Cusseaux
Ezell Ford
Shereese Francis
Eric Garner
Milton Hall
Korryn Gaines
Freddie Gray
Quintonio LeGrier
Kyam Livingston
Symone Marshall
Laquan McDonald
Natasha McKenna
Stephon Watts
Darnell Wicker
Mario Woods
And countless other Black Disabled/Deaf victims of police brutality.



We call for an end of the stigmatization of Black Disabled and Black Deaf people by those who claim to fight for us.

The Harriet Tubman Collective submits that any struggle against White supremacy must be an intersectional struggle against all systems of discrimination—including ableism and audism.

Organizations that label themselves “intersectional” must genuinely pursue disability justice. It is disingenu-

We will not be martyrs for a movement that denies our humanity. We demand that “social justice” coalitions, networks, and organizations end the violent erasure of disability from these and all other narratives of the victims of police violence and murder. We call for an end of the stigmatization of Black Disabled and Black Deaf people by those who claim to fight for us.

We are not an afterthought.
We are here.
We are fighting for all of our lives.
We are Black. We are Disabled. We are Deaf.
We are Black.
Our Black Disabled Lives Matter.
Our Black Deaf Lives Matter.

Endnotes can be found online at <http://hjaap.org/>.



Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.