

**BOOK REVIEW**

**Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present**, by Robyn Maynard. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2010. ISBN: 9781552669792, Pages: 1-234.

Reviewed by Anna Lippman<sup>1</sup>

Race-based data in Canada is and continues to be stark, particularly when compared with our neighbours to the south. Despite this dearth of research on the Black experience in Canada, Robin Maynard is able to compile a comprehensive picture of Canada's carceral project of Policing Black Lives. Robin Maynard's book provides a systematic account of the ways Canada has excluded, brutalized, and oppressed Black individuals, families, communities, and children. Maynard, an assistant professor of Black Feminisms at University of Toronto-Scarborough, outlines this often-unspoken Canadian history with a sharpness that bring this biting truth into the light. With a particular focus on state violence and systemic oppression, Maynard outlines how Canada is simultaneously able to bill itself as a nice, multicultural haven, and devise policies and practices that enact colonialist, anti-Black racism.

Despite the multitude of ways we see anti-Black racism operate in Canadian society, Maynard's book focuses specifically on state violence, giving it a clear trajectory and sharp focus. "Though anti-Blackness permeated all aspects of Canadian society, *Policing Black Lives* focuses primarily on state or state-sanctioned violence (though at times this is complemented with an enlarged scope in instances where anti-Black state practices were buttressed by popular hostility, the media or civil society). The reason for this focus is simple: the state possesses an enormous, unparalleled level of power and authority over the lives of its subjects" (Pg. 5). This book highlights the state's oppressive policies and practices meant to expel and exclude Black life, from slavery to the present day, showing that while anti-Blackness has shifted forms over time, it is still very much alive in modern-day Canada.

*Policing Black Lives* is broken up into eight chapters that broadly follow three larger themes. Chapters one and two provide a sociohistorical context of Black life within and around Canada. These chapters contextualize Canada within the Transatlantic Slave Trade and in the aftermath of slavery. Chapters one and two seek to disrupt the idea of Canada as the welcoming end of the Underground railroad. Through uncovering Canada's history of slavery and complicity in US slavery, these chapters unsettle the history lessons from Canadian public schools and trace the hostility towards Black people in Canada from the beginning of the colonial state to its practice of segregation post-abolition. Stark facts, such as the continuance of segregated (and unequal) schooling in Canada until 1983 (Pg. 34), dismantle discourses of Canadian multiculturalism chapter by chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Lippman is a PhD Candidate in the sociology department at York University. Her Dissertation, *All I Need Is One Mic*, explores how Black youth in Toronto engage hip-hop culture for identity construction and social activism. Anna is also a community organizer in Toronto and works with groups including Showing Up for Racial Justice and Independent Jewish Voices.

Chapters three, four, five, and six provide an overview and explanation of Black carceral geographies within Canada. These chapters explore the variety of ways the legal system, law enforcement, and policy itself work to enforce notions and practices that criminalize Black bodies, both inside and outside of jails and prisons. Chapter three shows how, similar to our neighbours to the south, the criminal justice system is designed to criminalize Black and Indigenous bodies and remove them from Canadian society. It is achieving its goals very effectively. Despite being just 3% of the Canadian population (Pg. 97), Black people make up the second largest percentage of people behind bars, with Indigenous people, who make up 5% of the population making up almost 25% of jails and prisons (Pg. 85). Maynard traces this phenomenon to the oversurveillance of Black bodies, through practices such as carding and the “War on Drugs” (Pg. 92).

Importantly, beyond men and the criminal justice system, Maynard devotes chapters four five and six to women, gender diverse people, and Black migrants. This serves to both show the web of practices and policies that work together in Canada to exert anti-Black racism, and highlights the richness of diverse bodies and stories within the Black diaspora. Chapter four highlights six case studies of women who were victims of police violence in Canada, representing an “untapped archive of the institutional denigration of Black women’s lives” (Pg. 116). Chapters five and six go further beyond conventional notions of criminalization through discussing anti-Black policies and practices in both social services and border ‘security’. These seemingly benevolent areas of the state act in ways that bring to fruition discourses surrounding Black poverty and welfare fraud in Canada. Furthermore, harsh over-regulation of Black bodies at both the border and in immigration policy has led to criminalization, detainment, and deportation for obscure legal reasons. The case of Debra Spencer, who had lived in Canada for decades after migrating when eight, and was deported in 2015 for a minor criminal offense (Pg. 175-176).

Chapters seven and eight focus on Black young people, through a focus on families and schools. Chapter seven looks at the ways anti-Black racism permeates the child welfare system, to the detriment of Black families and children. Maynard notes that Black youth in Toronto are 40% of the child welfare population, despite being 8% of the general population (Pg. 192). Maynard also outlines the myriad of ways Black youth under state care are treated with less care and resources than their white counterparts, both historically and today. Chapter eight present equally appalling statistics on Black youth, but in regards to schooling and education. In this chapter, suspension and expulsion as well as disproportionately high dropout rates are discussed against the backdrop of an education system that excludes Black bodies from both classroom and curriculum.

The conclusion offers much needed hope for the future after such a jarring orientation to Canada’s anti-Blackness. This hope stems from Maynard’s invitation to radically imagine the possibilities of Black futurities. She reminds us of the radical tradition of Black activism in Canada, both past and present. The reader is invited to imagine a world where Black bodies are celebrated, rather than brutally repressed. Where all have what they need to thrive, rather than simply fighting over table scraps. Finally, readers are invited to not just imagine this world, but to take action today in order to manifest these liberatory visions.