



Geography & Planning
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



Centre for Indigenous Studies
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

July 5, 2021

Executive Committee Secretary Catherine Regan,
12th Floor, West, City Hall
100 Queen Street West Toronto, On M5H 2N2
Email: exc@toronto.ca

Re: EX25.1 – Recognition Review Project Update and Response to the Dundas Street Renaming Petition

Dear Mayor Tory,

I am writing this letter to strongly support the renaming of city property that commemorates Henry Dundas, including Dundas Street and Dundas Square. I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography & Planning and the Centre for Indigenous Studies at the University of Toronto with 20 years of experience conducting collaborative research on Indigenous self-determination. While my letter is informed by my research expertise, I am also approaching this issue as a member of the Cree nation and of Constance Lake First Nation in Treaty 9, and as a voting member of the Davenport district in Toronto.

As is well documented by historian scholars, Henry Dundas played an active role in opposing the abolition of slavery, and in supporting colonial policies that had far reaching impacts. As a Secretary of State for War and Colonies in the 1790s, Dundas played a pivotal role in colonial structures in British colonies that would eventually become Canada and India, resulting in intergenerational impacts for Black, Indigenous and colonized peoples. Historians of the Caribbean have studied how Dundas had a direct role in Indigenous genocide on the island of St. Vincent. Under his direction, the British army attacked and exiled many of the island's Garifuna people in the late 18th century. Indeed, growing research on Henry Dundas exposes how members of civic society, including policy-makers, politicians, academics, grassroots organizers and educators must approach reconciliatory mandates through a global lens that accounts for the interconnections of imperialist policies, anti-Indigenous genocide and Black enslavement across space and time.

As you deftly indicate in the article recently published in the Toronto Star on June 28th, the renaming of Dundas Street does not mean we are erasing history. Rather, making this change will speak volumes to the diverse members of Indigenous, Black and culturally diverse members of our community who have increasingly spoken up over the last several years, following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Report in 2015 and the uprisings against anti-Black racism in the summer of 2020. Changing the name of Dundas Street would tell members of our

community, and our business partners, political allies and friends on national and international scales, that anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism will not be tolerated in this city.

Those opposing the renaming of Dundas Street often cite the financial costs of this change. I do not want to minimize the concerns raised by small business owners, in terms of the added costs and labor that this change might incur on their businesses, particularly given the ongoing challenges of pandemic closures. In my view however, governmental bodies, including the city of Toronto, must provide material support for anti-racism and reconciliatory mandates. That is, mere acknowledgements and apologies are quite simply inadequate within the current climate of anti-racism organizing and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion mandates. Furthermore, some of the costs sighted, including changes to mailing addresses and stationery seem to me to be a distraction from more fundamental concerns related to the core of this issue; that renaming Dundas Street is about responding to colonial markers within our everyday landscapes that do harm to Black, Indigenous and colonized peoples.

As a trained geographer, I write and teach about the meaning of landscapes and place-names. What is the message being sent to Black and Indigenous peoples in Toronto that the city's second largest and second oldest street, and one of the most iconic streets in the country, is named after a colonial official who had such devastating impacts on Black, Indigenous and colonized peoples around the globe? What happens when these histories are erased through ubiquitous celebrations of colonial officials, further erasing these histories and inhibiting a more informed public consciousness on colonial legacies? It is my understanding that the western portion of Dundas Street can be traced to an Indigenous trail that played a central role in cultivating Indigenous socio-political and economic life. We are living in a time when it is no longer acceptable for these histories and stories to be erased because colonial officials, in this case, Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe, implemented a policy of replacing Indigenous place names with British ones. Monuments and place names in our everyday landscapes matter because they can actively erase histories such as the ones that have become more well-known through processes such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I look forward to the day when I can stand in front of a lecture hall and teach my students about the day that the city of Toronto supported petitions to change the colonial landscape into one that acknowledges the resilience of Black and Indigenous communities who continue to shape and love this city. I hope you are in a position to lead this transformative change. Please feel free to contact me if you have additional questions. Thank you for your time and consideration, and for taking steps to eliminate anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism in the city of Tkaronto.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Michelle Daigle".

Michelle Daigle
Assistant Professor, Geography & Planning and Centre for Indigenous Studies
University of Toronto