#DefendBlackGirls:
Community Altar Building Toolkit

Sunday, April 25, 2021, 3-4pm EST

If you host a Community Altar-Build, please fill out the [Community Altar-Build Registry](bit.ly/defendblackgirls) so we may track and amplify your altar-build.
In 2016, Black Feminist Future led a call to action to Defend Black Womanhood in response to police murders of Black women (cis and trans) and girls. Twenty six community altars were built across the country to honor our dead and commit to fighting for the living. In 2021, we are raising the call, yet again, to honor the life and legacy of Ma’Khia Bryant and all the Black girls whose lives are cut short by police and state violence. We are asking comrades to participate in community altar building across the country. While we have identified Sunday, April 25th as a day of mourning and resistance, we welcome your participation on any day that you and your community can find time to do this activity together.

In this toolkit you will find info on:

- Why Altars?
- Keeping safe while being together
- Where, when and how to build altars
- The supplies for altar building
- Roles for altar building event
- How to hold space
- Shared messaging
- Graphics to use for socially distanced
- Social Media Toolkit
A message from Black Feminist Future

Our hearts are heavy, yet again, at the antiblack and patriarchal police state. Ma’khia Bryant should be here alive and thriving today. Black women and girls, both cis and trans, as well as gender non-conforming people, live under constant threat of violence from the anti-Black and sexist state. We deeply believe that Black liberation is achievable; and to get there we must center Black feminisms, build power, and organize to defend and protect Black women, girls, and gender non-conforming folks. We must rely on each other to keep us safe and remove our investment and reliance on police and policing. We are certain and clear that when Black women, girls, and gender expansive folks are safe and free, we all will get free.

WHY ALTARS?

As descendants of Afrika, particularly West Afrika, altars have always been an important part of our culture in Black America. Often kept in secret, disguised or hidden in the woods because in many places our cultures were outlawed and wiped out. The altar represents different things to different folks and traditions: the seat of the ancestors; the place of solace, ritual and magic-making; a religious symbol; a reminder of those who left us too soon.

It’s impossible in this brief toolkit to give information on the thousands of Afrikan cultures and the significance of altars within them all. So we won’t even try! However, please do your research to utilize traditions in a respectful manner.

Examples:

- Pouring libations and saying the names of those who have gone before us.
- Placing a white cloth to honor the purity of the soul.
- Ringing a bell.
- Burning an herb such such as sage, palo santo or impepho.

STAYING SAFE WHILE BEING TOGETHER

We are also living during a COVID pandemic that is threatening the health and wellness of Black people. We value your Black life and want you and your community to be safe while building an altar together. In order to be safe we ask that participants:

- Practice social distancing (avoid hugging, touching, etc.)
- Wear mask and gloves
- Have hand sanitizers or some way to sanitize your hands
- If you are not feeling well, please do not attend an altar build
WHEN

We will be building our altars on **Sunday April 25th** and times will be determined by the local organizers. Choose a time that works for you and folks in your community. You can build an altar in your home but we invite you to make this a public altar that will take up space and can allow for community participation. There can be multiple altars and gatherings in many different spaces. We will use Facebook and Instagram to share info about altar locations happening across the country.

LOCATION

- When thinking about possible locations for your altar you may want to consider the following prompts to help brainstorm ideas.
- A sight of violence that you want to reclaim and restore.
- An area of community importance or significance
- An area you want to reclaim
- An area that will be heavily trafficked by folks in the neighborhood so people can more easily plug in
- The location can be inside or outside

THE FEEL

Each location should create a space that makes sense to them. One location may be jubilant and celebratory. Another location may be one of grief and sadness. Most importantly, create a space for community building and togetherness.
Here is an example of a community built altar for a meeting.

Here is an example of a community altar.
Potential Roles to be filled for the event

Roles:

- Safety team
- Facilitators/Coordinators
- Someone to greet folks as they arrive
- Folks who are able to do a vibe check and check in with folks
- Documentation
- Media contact
- Clean up crew

Non Altar Items that you might need:

- Drums/Music/Amplification
- Supplies for folks to create pieces for the altar
- Snacks and water

ALTAR SUPPLIES

- Photos of those who have passed
- Candles
- Fabric
- Flowers
- Fruit
- Water and/or Strong Drink (alcohol as offering to the ancestors)
- Sage, frankincense, copal, etc
- Posters and artwork
- Supplies for people to add names to the altar - paper, markers

Calling on spiritual leaders - think about asking a knowledgeable elder or spiritual teacher to be present. Do not be discouraged if this is not available in your area. This may be an opportunity to build new connections by reaching out to others.

Say Her Name: Black Women and Girls We Have Lost

For the Defend Black Womanhood (Girlhood) altars, we said the names of Black women and girls who we have lost at vigils and events. You may also want to do this at the altar. After saying each name you could either say- Ashe, ring a bell, or say her name

Here is a link to Black women and girls murdered by state violence. This list is not exhaustive so please feel free to include additional names and has not been updated since 2015.

It has been difficult to find a list of all Black people killed by the police but this graphic has a majority of the names from the last 10 years.
HOW TO HOLD SPACE FOR OTHERS

Grief, sadness and rage in addition to other emotions may come up during your event. Expressing emotion is an important part of the process in this altar movement. If possible, call on people in your community who are trained to hold this space. Some things to consider:

Black folks often feel that we have to suppress our rage to survive in this society. It is important that folks feel this is a safe space to express.

Healing and grief go through several stages. It may be helpful to remind people that what they may be feeling is normal. Everyone processes differently.

If someone needs support beyond what you are able to offer, please refer them to a local resource such as a spiritual or crisis center.

SHARED MESSAGE

This is an opportunity to amplify and using a shared message can help. Please feel free to create your own Facebook event for your local event and use the text and image. Use the hashtags #DefendBlackGirls #ProtectBlackGirls #DefendBlackGirlhood to show unity in what is happening across the country.

SOCIAL MEDIA

We can use social media to increase the visibility of state violence against Black people. Please take pictures of your altars and tag using the hashtags #DefendBlackGirls #ProtectBlackGirls #DefendBlackGirlhood.

We’ve created a simple social media toolkit with sample posts and graphics. Post to your Facebook Event page. Use Instagram. Tweet. Do all the things. And make sure you tag the local activists and organizations doing work on the ground on this issue.

LIVE STREAM

We recommend that you live stream your altar building on Facebook and Instagram. Please tag Black Feminist Future so we can reshare the post.
ORGANIZATIONS TO SUPPORT

Ohio Families Unite Against Police Brutality: ofuapolicetrutality.com

Black Queer & Intersectional Collective: bqic.net

Black Liberation Movement Central Ohio: blmco.org

Central Ohio Freedom Fund: centralohiofreedomfund.org

People’s Justice Project: facebook.com/OhioPJP/

RESOURCES

Work on the intersection of Black women and girls and state violence has been happening for decades. This list is not exhaustive but a starting point. Please email constellation@blackfeministfuture.org to include more resources.

INCITE Women of Color Against Violence

In Our Names Network

A Long Walk Home

BFF: What is patriarchal violence?

She Safe, We Safe

#SayHerName: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women

In Defense of Korryn Gaines, Black Women and Our Children