

BLACK HISTORY MONTH | CELEBRATING DUDLEY LAWS

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Dudley Laws (1934–2011) | Agent of Change | Remembered as a key force in the establishment of Ontario's Special Investigations Unit (SIU) and the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System.

When Dudley Laws immigrated to Canada from England in 1965, he brought his skills as a welder and mechanic and a deep commitment to activism for Black rights. After settling in Toronto, he joined the Jamaican Canadian Association and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (the Garvey movement), which was later renamed the Universal African Improvement Association.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Laws figured prominently in the news as a critic of the then Metropolitan Toronto Police Force. He spoke out against the targeting of Black youth, and the shootings of Buddy Evans, Albert Johnson and Michael Wade Lawson by members of the force.

Following the police shooting death of yet another young Black man, Lester Donaldson, Laws co-founded the Black Action Defence Committee (BADC) with Charles Roach, Sherona Hall and Lennox Farrell. The BADC organized demonstrations, calling for an end to “police investigating police” in suspected cases of police wrongdoing. In response to their efforts, the Province established the country’s first Special Investigations Unit (SIU) in 1990 as an autonomous body to examine police misconduct.

Two years later, the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System was created to assess systemic racism in policing, the courts and correctional institutions, and to provide recommendations to address the issues.

Laws helped establish the Black Youth Community Action Project and supported changes to benefit Black inmates in the prison system. As an immigration consultant in the 1980s and 1990s, Laws advocated for immigrants from the Caribbean and refugees.

In 2011, Laws was admitted to Humber River Regional Hospital to be treated for cancer and kidney disease. Just days before, he had counselled inmates at Joyceville Penitentiary in Kingston, Ontario. Laws took a meeting with the Black Action Defence Committee in his hospital room hours before passing away.



At the annual Harry Jerome Awards hosted by the Black Business and Professional Association in 2016, Toronto Mayor John Tory spoke of his relationship with Laws. “When I first encountered Dudley Laws many, many years ago, I stepped back a little bit in the face of his advocacy. But I came to know him, I came to respect him, I came to work with him, and we came — all of us together — to make a lot of progress, thanks to his advocacy.”