

**FOOTNOTE FORUM'S MODERATED CONVERSATION
WITH MARIAME KABA AND DEAN SPADE ON THE
IMPORTANCE OF ARCHIVES TO OUR SOCIAL
MOVEMENTS¹**

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

zine, people, archives, ideas, movement, social movements, books, happening, create, talk, blog, trans, podcasts, community

[**Rachel Pincus**] 12:08:57

Mariame Kaba (also referred to by her friends as “MK”) is an organizer, educator, archivist, curator, and now officially, as of December 2022, a graduate of library school. Her work focuses on ending violence, dismantling the prison industrial complex, facilitating transformative justice, and supporting youth leadership development. After over 20 years of living and organizing in Chicago, she moved back to her hometown of New York City in May 2016. There, she co-founded the NYC chapter of Survived & Punished, whose national organization she also co-founded. Survived & Punished is a grassroots prison abolition organization fighting to free criminalized survivors. While Mariame has, in fact, founded approximately four million organizations and projects, I’m leaving it at just this one because that’s where we met.

Dean Spade is an activist, lawyer, writer and law professor at Seattle University School of Law. Dean has been working to build queer and trans liberation based in racial and economic justice for the past two decades. Dean is the author of *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*, and *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During this Crisis (and the Next)*.

I did want to give a little background to this conversation. I wanted to have a conversation about archives with Dean and MK for a few reasons. I thought that would be one way to get MK to say yes to an event at a law school, even in the virtual law school space. It’s also been a little over two years since my grandfather, a middle school librarian died, and I really did want to approach one of my projects at Law Review in a way that would call back to his memory. Also, in the course of all of our law school studies, we encounter questions of how we preserve and retell our stories and strategies for the fight for freedom—both as activists/organizers, and also as lawyers fighting

¹ Please note that this interview has been edited for length and clarity.

for our clients. Finally, I did draw a lot of inspiration from the “critical genealogy” framework of *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*² I’m just hoping to bring that into a reflection on our archives and our social movements. So, I think—starting with that—it is important to name in law school and in organizing, we sometimes try to replicate previous successes or think of them as “magic formulas [that] are shortcuts.”³

There is also a very well-founded criticism of lawyers’ dependence on analogical reasoning to fight for individual clients’ freedom⁴—especially since our politics demand expansive and system-wide arguments against the institutions keeping our communities unfree. So, with all that in mind—all that background about why I’m interested in talking about archives and also what I think archives bring to our movement work and to our lawyering work—I do want to have a conversation about how to approach archives in our social movement work at large, so I’ll be going through about six categories of archives. I do want to note that there are some big categories that are left out. So, those are things we might want to think about asking our guests after this more formal time. But I did try to cover a lot of ground; maybe too much ground. We will see.

I’m going to start with blogs and internet media. I wanted to start here because, actually, both of your blogs are the first media I remember encountering both of you [through], and I think that might be true for a lot of people. I might be totally wrong. I might be dating myself, but I think that that feels kind of accurate.

To me, blogs feel uniquely digestible and distributable, especially compared with online platforms these days, which definitely feel like they obscure more content with ads and algorithms. And I think, as we can all see from the case study of Twitter, content is honestly just disappearing. So, in that way both also feel slightly more durable than other online media. And I think something we talked about

² ANGELA Y. DAVIS, GINA DENT, ERICA R. MEINERS, & BETH E. RICHIE, *ABOLITION. FEMINISM. NOW.* xii (2022).

³ Naomi Murakawa, *Foreword* to MARIAME KABA, *WE DO THIS ’TIL WE FREE US* xix (2021). Poignantly, Murakawa follows the cautioning against thinking of Mariame Kaba’s countless tools as “magic formulas” with “[t]here are no life hacks to revolution.”

⁴ See, e.g., Richard Delgado, *Four Reservations on Civil Rights Reasoning by Analogy: The Case of Latinos and Other Nonblack Groups*, *COLUM. L. REV.* 1883, 1895-1904 (describing four drawbacks to applying Reconstruction-era legal protections for Black people to the struggle to achieve formal civil legal equality for other communities of color in the United States).

earlier during the screening of *Pinkwashing Exposed* with you last year⁵—Dean—you also mentioned the vulnerability of websites to co-optation or predation. I think you mentioned that Zionists took deanspade.com and directed it to some pretty disgusting media. I don't honestly remember the details, but there are ways in which blogs are—and websites are—just a little more vulnerable. Given the ways that blogs seem both more enduring and potentially more vulnerable, can you please talk about their role in our social movements? And I did not think about which order for you to talk. So, fight amongst yourselves, please.

[Dean Spade]12:15:30-12:20/8:41

Like you, Rachel, I first encountered Mariame's work on her blog. Media has changed so much since the mid-nineties, when I started being active in our movements. Because of the internet, we can more easily put our word out to a lot of people instantly. It doesn't actually mean people see it, of course. But there was a big shift in how we publish ideas. I often think about how in 1999 when the Battle of Seattle happened before the internet was what it is now I was in law school in Los Angeles. I had the kind of free dial-up internet with 10 hours a week, shared by my entire household, that most people I knew had. We never used up the whole 10 hours—that was how much less we used the internet. I didn't get my news from the internet then. I think we mostly used it for email which we did not do very much. I remember when the Battle of Seattle happened, where people were protesting globalization at the World Trade Organization meetings that were being held in Seattle, and I heard about it on the mainstream news. Even though I was connected to Seattle activists, whose zines about racism and Palestine liberation had strongly influenced me, we still weren't in enough regular contact for me to know they were preparing for these huge protests. A zine took a while to get to somebody in New York or LA. I was learning from people far away, but not the way we do now, where we can follow other organizers posts about what they are prepping for on a local level in real time.

These days I'm living in Seattle, and I can closely watch, for example, what's happening in the Atlanta forest.⁶ Or in 2020, we could watch each other's see footage of what was happening in the streets taken by and posted by other organizers. We can follow even

⁵ CUNYJLSA (@cunyjlsa), INSTAGRAM (Apr. 4, 2022), <https://perma.cc/99TG-UZX3>.

⁶ Micah Herskind, *This is the Atlanta Way: A Primer on Cop City*, SCALAWAG, <https://perma.cc/M7AA-NHPU>.

small projects, like I can be tracking what a small mutual aid project is doing in another city and I can see enough detail to learn from. And I can try to find out who to ask questions of if I have questions about something cool that I want to know how they're doing it.

Blogs, I think, were a turning point, before social media but with more quick access to people's updates about their strategies and analysis. They were shorter than a whole zine—you might post just a quick rant or half-baked thought or report. They were and are often sharing access to part of a conversation inside a movement dilemma or inside conflicts or group dynamics. That is very useful. A downside with any account of movement action, of course, is that sometimes we think we can easily replicate some tactic that is being reported on from somewhere else, but we don't actually know all the nuanced details about it. We sometimes adopt really simplistic stories about something that someone else did or is doing. We don't mean to do it. It's not ill-intentioned, but we'll just have only a tiny part of it and that will circulate. That is one reason why archives are important. They often offer researchers and writers and organizers ways of asking more questions. What were these people actually debating inside their work? What were the turning points in some of their strategies? And how did they think it didn't succeed even if we see it as a big success? What were they unhappy with? What were they actually going for, because all of that stuff can be narrated by our opponents sometimes to make it seem [like] a victory and liberation happened when it didn't. Or it can be narrated inside our movements in a simplistic way, like it cuts out part of who was working on it, or what the power dynamics were, or why it worked—like, what the relational dynamics were that made it work. That if you missed that you wouldn't be able to get the most useful lessons. Sometimes I think blog posts have been a place where people have hashed out ideas along the way, before being ready to put them in a zine or book or something more labor-intensive.

Media changes really rapidly, and how people use different forms of media is always changing. But I do think that for many years, that was part of how that was helping me—was seeing people's quick reflection or process or response, but that was more thoughtful and deep than a tweet. Or sometimes blog posts had links throughout that showed where they got some of these ideas or what they were referring to, let you into a debate that's happening locally, inside a particular formation. Those are my initial thoughts. I'd love to hear what Mariame's thinking.

[**Mariame**] 12:20:08

Thank you, Dean, for going first. I appreciate it. Thanks for having me today. I was thinking—much like almost everything in my life—I got into blogging reluctantly. So, I think—contrary to what people now see me as—I’m a Luddite. I am somebody who does not really like to take up new technologies.

It so happened that I started my blog Prison Culture back in 2010.⁷ It was basically based on the suggestion initially, and then the constant badgering, of a young person I was supporting, as he made his way through a court case. And at a certain point in time, because—you know—I do like to pontificate with people I know, this young person was like, “Miss K., you need to start a blog.” And I was like, “I don’t . . . no, I’m not gonna do that.” And he was like, “No, you need to write down all your ideas and thoughts, because other people are really gonna learn from you. And then you can also uplift the work that you do in that way.” And I was like, “Well, I am not interested,” because of the fact that I am a longtime journaler, I’ve been journaling since I was a small person. I think my first journals are from when I was 10 years old—you know—and I’ve continuously journaled my whole life. I thought like I don’t have any need for a public journal. . . . I’m not interested in that. So, I was like, “No, I’m not interested.” Then a few months passed, and he came back to me again. And he was like, “Are you worried about figuring out how to make a blog?” And I was like, “Well, yes, because I’m not a technology person. I’m not gonna learn to code to make a blog.” I didn’t even know anything about how to do it. And he’s like, “I will show you how to do it. It’s so easy, you don’t have to do anything in terms of coding and stuff.” So he showed me how to go ahead and create a WordPress blog, and that’s how I started blogging.

The other thing is that I don’t like writing. Writing is really hard for me. It takes a long time, I’m very slow at it. But what blogging did for me is it allowed me to micro-blog. I basically could just put a couple of ideas down and some photos that I had found, or I could reflect on a thing that was happening in real time and just post my ideas about it. So, what I ended up liking about blogging was that it helped me to clarify what I thought about particular issues, like it allowed me to basically go back to doing some more regular journaling, but just doing it online. And it also became a space for me to document the work I was doing with others, a kind of unfiltered medium for that. I didn’t have to talk to a reporter who would then assess and summarize and interpret my voice for their piece, which

⁷ *New Zine: Letter to the Anti-Rape Movement*, PRISON CULTURE (Apr. 19, 2020), <https://perma.cc/658L-PP57>.

usually never comes out the way you talked about it. I could just post what was going on. If I went to a protest, I can post about the protest. If we were working on a project, I can post about that project. If I wanted to uplift other people's projects, I can post about that. But then over time—I did this for many years— it became clear to me that the preservation of a blog depends a lot on labor, on a lot of labor and maintenance. Because blog posts are subject to link rot.⁸ And that's something I noticed in my blog, for example, I would have a blog post and two years later, you would click on links and the links would be gone. And if you don't keep up with paying your hosting fees for your blog, then you'll lose all the content in it because it's held by a third party, like those parts of the fragility of blogging later led me to re-evaluate the ephemerality of information on the web.

And so, I've come to think of blogs as being a kind of digital form of scrapbooking. I don't know how many of you ever had your own scrapbook at any point in your life. This may be—this is definitely dating me. But . . . scrapbooks have this really interesting history. Scrapbooks date back for hundreds of years. Since the 15th century, people have been making ways of trying to document their lives,⁹ making little ways of being able document significant events that happened in their lives together all in one place. And the idea of scrapbooking takes off in the 15th century in particular, when people start putting together family Bibles as records of keeping track of what was happening in their lives.¹⁰ And then they had these things called commonplace books¹¹ that were really popular with upper class people in Europe during the Renaissance period that are some of the ones if you ever go and you asked to look in archives and look at . . . commonplace books, you'll find these beautiful pieces that were created by people.

In the States, in the late . . . 19th century into the early 20th century, it was a craze of scrapbooking, which Black people participated in in the U.S. right after Emancipation, they started creating a bunch of

⁸ Mitchell Clark, *New Research Show How Many Important Links on the Web Get Lost to Time*, VERGE (May 21, 2021, 4:00 PM), <https://perma.cc/N9NN-VCKM>.

⁹ CSUN UNIV. LIB., *History of Scrapbooks* (Oct. 22, 2019), <https://perma.cc/43X9-GG7S>.

¹⁰ *Family Bibles*, Museum of the Bible (Aug. 23, 2021), <https://perma.cc/C6KL-TUNE>.

¹¹ Don Skemer, *Commonplace Books and Uncommon Readers*, PUL MANUSCRIPT NEWS (Aug. 3, 2016), <https://perma.cc/U9GZ-LC3W>.

scrapbooks.¹² And we have some of those in special collections and archives today.¹³ And some of those scrapbooks are how we know about things that happened in people's lives, like in real actual time, what was going on for them. So, you can think of blogs as kind of the 1990s and 2000s versions of scrapbooks in my opinion. And that's how I basically started to think of mine as a scrapbook.

[**Rachel Pincus**] 12:26:44

That's so interesting. It's really interesting that you mentioned journaling, MK, because honestly my first context for—not my first context for blogs, but a big context for me was definitely LiveJournal and just the practice of like people... it's funny... like, yeah, I think I had a personal life journal, I knew plenty of people who did, too. But then—when I went to college, we had, like, a... it was like, our LiveJournal, our, like, internal craigslist, but it was also... I don't think there's a way to actually keep them private, and so it is interesting to think about these, like, individual and communal practices of scrapbooking and journaling, that we also then put on the internet and those archives decay. Websites are... they seem too tricky for me.

[**Mariame**] 12:27:46

Importantly, they decay faster than paper. And I think that's something people don't seem to understand—is that the text, the text stuff that has been made since—that it's not going to last. And I think people have the opposite view, which is that they think that everything that's been put online will be there forever. It's already “digitized”—it might be digitized, it's not preserved. And the technologies are much more fragile than actual paper, which is why we have books from, like, . . . the 14th, and 15th, and 16th and 17th century that are in great shape.¹⁴ And then we have books that are made in the 20th century that have completely dissolved. And it's because paper was made differently at that time.¹⁵ Paper was made to last, right, in pre-19th century. And paper then became made for capitalist public use.¹⁶ And that paper was trash. And so now on

¹² *Scrapbooking in Reconstruction: How the Douglass Family Used Scrapbooks to Reclaim their Stories*, N.Y. HIST. SOC'Y (May 15, 2023), <https://perma.cc/HT9U-KNPK>.

¹³ Cynthia Greenlee, *A Priceless Archive of Ordinary Life*, ATLANTIC (Feb. 9, 2021), <https://perma.cc/W7XA-2NXQ>.

¹⁴ Jeff Somers, *Here are the Oldest Known Surviving Books in the World*, GRUNGE (Jan. 18, 2023, 3:11 PM), <https://perma.cc/TT8F-RU3P>.

¹⁵ *The Deterioration and Preservation of Paper: Some Essential Facts*, LIBR. CONG., <https://perma.cc/9LFW-5JXL>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

every paper, think of the paperbacks you'd have, from the 1960s, just in your collection. Look at how yellowed and, and cracking those papers, pieces of paper are, and then go and look at a book from the 17th century and look at how beautiful those pages remain. You know?

[**Dean Spade**]12:29:07/22:19

Can I add one thing to this? I'm just thinking about the decision points people make about what goes on a blog versus a zine or another project. I was making a paper zine with my best friend in the mid-90's for a while called *Make*, and then, we made a website for it¹⁷ in, like, maybe 1998 or something. I guess it was a blog, though I don't think we used that word at the time. The website allowed us to post more like little entries, not all of which would make it into the paper zine that we would make periodically. It was a process of deciding what's really important to reproduce in the paper zine. I'm thinking about people like you, Mariame, or other people I admire and wondering, "what did they play with first on a blog or on a LiveJournal before putting into a zine or a larger project?" I'm also just thinking right now about how much more I used to write. I think there's some dynamics around the organizing and around having more and more responsibility, more projects the longer you do this stuff. And how, for me, what falls out is time to do that kind of just more musing, more contemplative time, more like lighter writing.

[**Mariame**] 12:30:49

Yes, and I'm so with you on that about the musing. I love that word because that's what I think—I use that word a lot, because musing reminds you of what it used to feel like to go to a library that had actual books in it, and you didn't know, you didn't have a card catalogue—I mean, you had a card catalog, but you didn't have the computer catalog to find the book that you immediately wanted. So, you had to go to the to the actual stacks—remember this?—you had to go to the actual stacks, and to look through every single thing in the 360 number to get that one book. But you discovered all these other books as a result of that. Right? Like, just from the musing or browsing . . . and that's how I felt for me, at least about blogs and blogging. It felt like the thing I do in my journal, which is like, muse—like literally walk through the stacks exploring in my brain different things that may not seem connected at first. When you go back and look at it again, then you made connections because you didn't know what you thought until you wrote it down. And again, not writing for writing, but just like literally writing for exploring—

¹⁷ MAKE ZINE, <https://perma.cc/RN5P-TBZ5> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

writing for musing, writing for getting shit down like a brain dump—you know. So yeah, so I'm so with you on that. And I think it's so important, and I don't have time for that anymore in a public way because also writing becomes a different kind of writing when you're writing books, and you're writing essays for people that need you to write in a concise way and make it [an] argument. Like, you didn't have to make, you don't have to make an argument in your blog post, you know.

[Dean Spade] 12:32:24

I think the development of the internet changed a lot. It's a lot harsher out there now. Musing or playing with an idea is not very safe. I remember the experience of writing things on the *Make* zine blog and . . . having people disagree. I remember having really good exchanges and learning through people disagreeing instead of it being a takedown. I just want to name that I think it's harder to muse in the contemporary, heightened, everything weaponized kind of space.

[Mariame] 12:33:01

I agree. I think it definitely is, and I also think when your profile changes because of your public onlineness, it also becomes impossible for you to muse in public again that way. It just doesn't, it doesn't work in the same way. Interestingly enough, the very thing that you were doing in the shadows becomes a thing that becomes public. And then when it's public, you can no longer be musing in public, you know. So, it's like it's kind of turned around on you in a weird way.

[Rachel Pincus] 12:33:42

Thank you both so much for those answers. I feel like they're giving me a lot to think about in terms of libraries in general, and I think we can definitely, I think, a question we might want to think about now, and save to answer for later is—like, what are the solutions to preserving both our internet media and the other media we'll talk about shortly. I know, MK, you just talked about, like, how amazing of an experience it is to get lost in the stacks—or maybe not get lost. But I will say—I worked in my undergrad library for the entire time I was at college and learned so much just by, like, I think I was like an Inter-Library Loan assistant, and also did some, like, inventory and page work, and then was also a reference assistant. So, I saw way more subjects than I would ever see if I were just in my little, like, chemistry-physics major bubble. And it is wild how you just, like, happen upon all these different things. But yeah, I think a question to think about for later is, like—I am curious, we have like this, you

know, government preservation through the Library of Congress, but we also have other more grassroots, community-based ways of saving all our stuff. And so yeah, that's a question I'm gonna ask at the end.¹⁸

In the meantime, I'm gonna transition to zines, which I know you both talked about a lot in our first segment of conversation. So, this category does feel way too expansive to ask you to talk about in a short amount of time. But zines—as both of you mentioned—have been pivotal to a lot of organizing, including organizing for criminalized survivors¹⁹ and people in prison,²⁰ that I think we have in common. Zines are also one of the most easily distributable and accessed medium for political education that I can think of. I know Dean did mention, like, back in the day it would take a while for the zine to make it to somebody, and I think that is—I mean, that's still the case. People do—you know—order paper copies to be delivered to them. But we do also print them—mass print them and distribute them in lots of different ways. And I think in that way people who aren't necessarily looking for them might encounter them more than other kinds of political education. I think at this point, they're also really important because they are—they do propagate both digitally and in print. And MK, you also somewhat recently started a micro press with Nana Bomani, Sojourners for [Justice] Press,²¹ because of how important zines are. So, I'm just hoping you can both talk about how zines have influenced or furthered your organizing and what a special place they hold in recounting our social movement struggles and why they're an important medium. And, MK, I'm gonna pass it to you first.

[**Mariame**] 12:37:25/30:36

Sure. Yeah, I love zines, I've been a zinester and a zine maker since I was a teenager, and that practice has essentially continued into my late middle age with modifications, of course. Before, I used to create zines using photocopiers, and even before that [with] mimeograph machines and scissors at my dad's office. And I moved on to

¹⁸ We did not actually have time to think about this question.

¹⁹ See, e.g., *No Selves to Defend: A Legacy of Criminalizing Women of Color for Self-Defense*, CHI. ALL. TO FREE MARISSA ALEXANDER (2014), <https://perma.cc/Y52R-2WU6>; *No Good Prosecutors Now or Ever: How the Manhattan District Attorney Hoards Money, Perpetuates Abuse of Survivors, and Gags Their Advocates*, SURVIVED & PUNISHED N.Y.C. ANTI-PROSECUTION WORKING GROUP (2021), <https://perma.cc/3VR9-JTAH>.

²⁰ *A Story of Attica*, PROJECT NIA (2011), <https://perma.cc/D5AX-ZBSF>.

²¹ SOJOURNERS FOR JUSTICE PRESS, <https://perma.cc/WY9M-XF2S> (last visited Mar. 4, 2023).

collaborating with artists and designers now to create beautiful and, I hope, kind of engaging publications which maybe some people consider more art book than actual zine. But we don't have to get into that argument. But, yeah, I hold on to a zinester spirit in my work.

I think, you know, there's been writing and kind of a lot of theorizing about zine and zine culture and zine-making in the last... I don't know... 20 years or so, and some people think about zines as kind of being able to be understood as a community archive of sorts. And I think that makes some sense in the way that community archives are supposed to be coming from people who are marginalized, in communities setting up their own spaces to document and to share pieces of their lives. I think you can think of zines in that way too. I would also suggest that zines can be mini exhibits that include archival materials and visual art and texts, and anything else that you want to assemble. So, [there is] a lot about assemblage in zines and zine-making that, I think, is interesting.

For me—I think zines have become an example of—I'm a collector, I collect a lot of different kinds of things—and they've been an example of me turning my collections into publicly accessible archives, basically, through the making of various kinds of zines. . . . The things I love about zines, and always have, has been the tactile nature of them. The fact that you can independently produce them with little to no money, that you know you can hold the results of your collaboration in your hands, and maybe you read it, and then you hopefully pass it on to someone else who you think might want to read it. Like, they're not meant to be precious things. They're meant to be shared, and I think now that you can also make digital versions, it's just a new, wider audience that can access it, and you can make it possible for them to download it and create hard copies for them as well in a way that might enhance the dissemination and circulation of what you created.

And ultimately, I think for me, making zines has been about trying to make histories relevant to and to insert particular ones into the current conversations that I'm having and into the current organizing communities that I'm part of. And I'll speak more to this when we talk more about study guides and popular and political education, because I think that zines are a form of public history and or can be a form of public history. And they can also be vehicles of intergenerational storytelling and they are ways of sharing knowledge across time and space. And I think you gotta use all of the opportunities to do that in various kinds of ways, particularly if you are, if you are embedded in social movements, right? I mean one of

the big things that I got when I was growing up in these spaces in my teenage years is—I got the benefit of being in spaces with people who were much older than I was, and in those times, you would talk to people, and therefore you had people that you could hear from about the stories of things they went through. They told you stories, and you were kind of learning from the relationship-building of being in those spaces with those folks.

Something I've noticed over the years is how, how so many of our movement spaces lack intergenerational opportunities to connect, lack an opportunity for people to really tell stories intergenerationally part of what happened—and I'll be brief, and then let Dean jump in here. But part of what ended up happening [when] I came, when I moved back to New York—I moved back, and I was trying to like not to create any more containers for work. I was telling everybody: I'm not starting anything. No more new projects. I'm not—you know what—I mean projects, yes, like my own individual projects—but, collective projects, organizations, groups. I didn't want to do that—for lots of different kinds of reasons, right? Mainly because I've been doing it for so long—since I was a teenager—and I was like, I'm tired, and I want to work on other things. I'm in my third season of life. But what ended up happening is, I moved back home to New York, and a bunch of young people would ask me, “How can we be part of the work you do? . . . Like, these things . . . we don't have this here, like, where are we going to do it? How do we make our own things? How do we?” I just kept getting those questions over and over again, from various people. Many of whom I didn't know but “knew me” through social media, right and they knew I'd move back to New York, and they were here in New York.

And that's how S&P New York came to be—like, when I asked the people at S&P, what I said when I left, “there will be no affiliate of S&P in New York City, because I am tired, and we're not doing it; it's too much.” I say all that to say that I used to be able to—and you've seen this, too, Rachel, like, within our spaces, like there are not that many older people like over the age of 50 spending time with 20-year-olds—you know. And there's a lot of real reasons for that among which is capitalism, the late-stage capitalism ravaging of people's lives, so that you can't actually hold on and do this kind of organizing work while you're trying to raise your family and, think about your retirement and now caring for your parent, your elderly parent, alongside, who has time to also then be doing mentorship of younger organizers while you're doing all that, right? Like, it hasn't made it possible for us. It's actually made it really hard for us to stay in this work for a long time, because it's work that's usually

uncompensated. It is a lot... I'm telling you, it's a lot to hold it together. So, I think of zines now as, like, a way for me to do some intergenerational storytelling work with young people I'm never gonna get into contact with. But I'm, I feel still tied in the movements, the larger social movement of—you know—abolitionist struggle, politics, all the other stuff that I care deeply about. . . .

And then the last thing I just want to say about this is: my folks who are locked up—both family members and other loved ones—tell me *regularly* of how important zines are to them, how important it is to the communities they're forming on the inside, to their own continued political education. You know my comrade, Stevie Wilson, for example, who's been locked up for many years and was recently infuriatingly denied parole, has spoken and written publicly a lot about how important zines are to him and his fellow incarcerated comrades, and I'm just going to put in the chat, and this is something maybe you can use if you want to—I'm not going to go through it—but this is a twitter thread that he did about what zines mean to folks on the inside, and why, really, zines are more important in many ways than books, because they can get in in a different way.²² They can be distributed internally, you can still use photocopiers sometimes in the library that allow you to print out lots of copies of that and share it for, like, there's just a whole kind of thing about the zine. The kind of information that gets put into zines is also different than the information that gets put into books. Like all that stuff. So that's a long way of saying to me, zines are incredibly important as a medium for communication. They're important as a space for potentially being able to disseminate and create new ideas. And they're really important for a way to be able to share historical information with others and each other. So those are things I think about.

[Dean Spade]12:46:06/39:17

Can you just tell us what your first zines were about?

[Mariame Kaba] 39:22

Yeah, I started making zines when—I think I made my first zine when I was about 15 years old, I think—probably, I would say. And that was about actually Michael Stewart here in New York.²³ Michael Stewart—when I was 12, Michael Stewart was killed, and that was the thing that activated me around, kind of, the violence of the State,

²² Stephen Wilson (@AlwaysStevie), TWITTER (Mar. 30, 2020 9:24 AM), <https://perma.cc/24HC-YM39>.

²³ Peter Schjeldahl, *Basquiat's Memorial to a Young Artist Killed by Police*, NEW YORKER (July 1, 2019), <https://perma.cc/QTS3-KLC2>.

and it was—it propelled me forward. It was the first protest I ever attended on my own—well, technically not on my own because my older sibling and their friends went, and I just tagged along after them, and they pretended they didn't know me—but I was there, kind of by myself and I wrote a piece that was some sort of, a kind of, rant about making a connection between another killing that had just happened, and the Michael Stewart case. I was trying to show people in my 15-year-old way that this was a continuity. That's how far I could go—was, like, three years back at that time. And . . . that's as much history as I had about policies. So, I was already trying to make those historical connections at that age, in a very sloppy way.

And then I would also—I did a bunch of zines about music because I was obsessed with music. I did zines about dance because I was a dancer, and so I made a zine about some Black ballerinas. I mean, I did a whole bunch of different kinds of zines. And then, when I got older, in my twenties I started making a zine called *Adventures in Youth Work*—which, interestingly enough, I don't have any of those. I don't have copies of any of my zines; I never kept anything. And I say this all the time. A lot of the work I did as a teenager, it wasn't till my mid-twenties that I became a collector of stuff—my own stuff and other people's stuff—because I didn't realize at the time; I didn't have a sense of, of preservation at that time. I just was doing them and sharing them. And there were these great places where you—there were actual magazines that existed that would be zine distro magazines that you would put ads in, and you would let people know that you had it, and then that they could get it—for free, if they sent a self-addressed envelope in, in an envelope—that you would send them a copy of your zine. And . . . sometimes you would just, say for the cost of postage—you know—put a dollar into this.

Like, it was fun. It was fun. It was a good way of communicating with people I never would have met any other way—you know—getting a letter from some random person in Portland who was like, “yes, send me a copy of *Adventures in Youth Work*.” That was so fun to me—you know—and it turns out—I didn't know this, but some of my *Adventures for Youth Work* zines are at Portland Zine Distro. That's how I found some copies of my old stuff, was through them—that somebody had just given it away. I don't think they knew anything about me, or—you know—knew whatever; many of my zines, I never signed with my name. So, they're anonymous, and most of that was true—that's most of the things I made; I never put my name on [them] for the longest time until I was frankly in my late thirties. So, yeah, I loved it. Thank you for asking. It's so fun to think about.

[Dean Spade]12:49:21/42.32

It is fun to think back about, about that time and how we shared ideas. I was thinking about what you said earlier, about how it's so different than talking to a journalist. I think so much of my experience of making zines in the very beginning, in the mid-90s. I didn't think I would ever write anything anyone would ever publish. I grew up working class; my mom didn't go to high school. I was going to school, but I didn't see myself as a writer. I saw that my classmates at college who were raised differently had a kind of sophistication and I just knew: that I didn't have. In my mind, I wasn't going to become somebody like that.

And so . . . the idea that you could just write anything down and then publish it yourself with your friends was so freeing. All my first zines were collaborative with my close friends in activist groups. It felt like, with a lot of what we were writing about, we'd never see anywhere else. These weren't topics that publishers were making books about. A really influential zine I read around that time that I mentioned earlier was this zine about Palestine that two queer Seattle activists had made and somehow ended up circulating among my New York City queer friends. I don't think I would have run across that information anywhere except for a zine at that time. I remember, one of my friends wrote in one of our early zines about "Indo chic"—cultural appropriation of South Asian aesthetics, white women wearing bindis and all that. And she was Indian and wrote about what that was like from her perspective, and those were new ideas for people in our multi-racial queer activist circles reading her writing at the time.

[Dean's internet cuts out]

[Dean Spade]12:51:16/44:22

I also wrote a lot of zines and blog posts at the time about trans stuff. What was out there about trans politics and experience was so limited then. It was mainly these medicalized narratives, often focused on white trans women. So much of it was stuff that, like, me and my friends couldn't relate to at all, very gender binaristic; not feminist or anti-racist or anti-capitalist. It was really a big deal that we were creating a different way to know each other and analyze our experience and strategize our resistance through zines.

Even basic life-saving stuff about how to deal with your job, how to deal with your doctor, even things like what lies to tell to get what you need—stuff that's not gonna come out in a book or in a

mainstream article—it was all in blogs and zines. Finding out we could write for each other in zines was so freeing to me. I remember, and we would often use the word “rants,” to talk about what our zine pieces were—it wasn’t the kind of writing you’d have to do if you were going to try to get an article published in a newspaper or a school newspaper or write for a class or some other formal space. You could just say what you really thought and be openly political. Now there’s so many places to do that online, we’re kind of flooded. It was interesting with zines. You make this thing, and you have no idea who is ever going to see it. If you’re organized, you could put into one of the zine distro magazines. But most people just made 30 copies and stuck them inside the weekly paper in a paper box, or brought them to an event, gave them out at a protest. Many zines that deeply influenced me I just found in someone else’s house when I had a meal or stayed over.

[**Rachel Pincus**] 12:53:43/46:54

So, I think that’s a good transition... thinking about the freedom to, like, create content and rant about things that are happening. That’s a good transition to our next topic, which is podcasts. It might not be the best transition, who knows? But you have both appeared on a ton of podcasts like the one that we’re technically recording right now. Many podcasts provide an opportunity to reflect both on big and important themes.²⁴ They can also survey and dissect discrete projects.²⁵ I think we’re doing kind of both of those things right now. Podcasts can also break down complex academic ideas and resources²⁶ or collect experiences from people with shared identities.²⁷ I think audio conversations are also important, not only to distill big ideas or stories in ways that people can absorb, but they also frequently are, or act, as oral history projects.²⁸ Given that you’ve both engaged in so many different recorded conversations—which I think at this point in the pandemic includes, like, a ton of webinars—can you please reflect on the importance of recorded audio conversations or podcasts to our social movement?

²⁴ See, e.g., *Movement Memos: Adventures in Digital Organizing with Mariame Kaba*, TRUTHOUT, (May 14, 2020), <https://perma.cc/6357-XYW5>.

²⁵ See, e.g., *One Million Experiments*, <https://perma.cc/ZYS5-CY9C> (last visited Mar. 4, 2023) (“Exploring snapshots of community-based projects that expand our ideas about what keeps us safe.”).

²⁶ See generally *Millennials are Killing Capitalism*, <https://perma.cc/3T5W-8RMC> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

²⁷ See, e.g., *Jewish Ancestral Healing Podcast Season 2*, <https://perma.cc/827Y-3EQ6> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

²⁸ See, e.g., *New York Trans Oral History Project*, <https://perma.cc/S4JX-D6M4> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

[Dean Spade]12:55:22/48:34

I really enjoy a podcast. They require an enormous amount of technical work to make. I think that labor might be invisible to some people. What it takes to put on the podcast or a webinar, and then have it be high-quality enough that people can really hear it or see if (ASL, captioning, interpretation, sound quality), to figure out how to spread the word about it, it's a lot. Much of podcasting is very professionalized and tied into commercial streams or takes a lot of technical labor to produce. That's different from some of the zine making that we're talking about. Different media have different pros and cons in terms of reach, in terms of access needs, and in terms of who can do it successfully, depending on resources. Some people manage to figure out how to do some things on the cheap, but a lot of highly-produced sounding stuff is actually highly-produced. I appreciate that point that, especially once the pandemic started, a lot of things that would have been live events moved to webinars or online events, and that's been amazing because of more people being able to access it in lots of different ways.

That has changed some of the conversations, especially the moment of the uprising in 2020 and the pandemic, and the kinds of ways that the ideas about abolition have [been] circulating and a level of access people have to deep, thoughtful conversations with people who have tried a lot of resistance experiments from a lot of different places. That is helping our movements in persevering and enriching everybody. Interrupting Criminalization has made a lot of that happen, maybe more than anything else, facilitating that kind of tools, tactics, and strategy sharing.

I also want to name that that there's a level of overwhelm by the amount of amazing content there is right now. Something I worry about for people in our communities is how to make sure there's enough time for contemplation and for solitude. Do we all still get to have times when where we're not taking in others' ideas and where we are digesting our own experiences, emotions, and ideas. Recently, I have been reading about the research about the fact that a lot of people are taking something in at all times through a podcast or audiobook or show—when you're riding a bus, when you're walking to work, when you're doing the dishes. Sometimes I've noticed, especially since the pandemic started, I have sometimes felt kind of addicted to information, and I have to remind myself to have periods of silence while walking or doing household tasks.

I say that because, not because the podcasts and webinars aren't wonderful and useful, but I think we have to also figure out how to be human animals with all of this technology available. I don't want people to think that they have to be like to know everything in order to act. I think that can also be a feeling that the internet culture provides—if I haven't researched and read and thought of everything, then someone's gonna call me out if I make any kind of intervention, or try to take action in my community, or try to say something. I wonder if we can both enjoy the abundance of communication that's available to us and not create standards of perfection and find enough space to digest our experiences. There can be a grasping for information because we're all so scared of the conditions that are happening. Maybe we need more time experiencing that things are scary and hard, and comforting each other and caring for each other, and not just trying to think our way out of it. At the same time, podcasts are really great because they can be a lot deeper than some of the analysis that people are getting when they're just reading tweets or memes and missing some of the complexity.

[**Mariame**] 13:00:19/53:30

Yeah, I mean, I ditto everything Dean has to say, and I don't have much to add beyond that, except to say that—on my end, the thing that's useful about podcasts is that the best ones are conversations. And oftentimes, if you're in a podcast conversation with an excellent fellow conversationalist, sometimes you discover things yourself, as you are talking, which is what I appreciate about them. I also appreciate that many people actually post what you said—for good or for bad. It wasn't necessarily edited—you know—in some weird, interesting way. And I'm talking here about people who do this kind of, like, grassroots podcast-y things. You know, like, your full interview will be on there, even if it's two hours, not the shortened version of it. And I like that—I like the rawness of that. I like the—you know—DIY-ish kind of aspect of that again, going back to my deep love of zines. . . . I think that those are things that I think are so important.

And I agree with Dean that the information overwhelm is so real. *And*, I always like to say there was so much I didn't have when I was coming up as a young person trying to figure out my way in the world, around how to make a difference in that world, that I just look back at so much—I think about this particularly with transformative justice work, we did not have anything in terms of direction from people who could help us directly. Like, literally, we were making it up with our peers along the way. If you were lucky to have peers, you were able to find in community that was also doing what you were

doing, which was very rare. You know who is writing, who's doing CA processes²⁹—there were, like, seven other people that you could know of, and you weren't in regular touch with five of those people; you had two if you were lucky.

That stuff—I remember sitting with my friend Shira Hassan³⁰ many years ago, at a certain point in time, and Shira just turned to me, she said, “nothing's written down.” Like, yeah, nothing's written down. Everything is in our heads and in other people's heads, and that's gonna be a problem, because there will be a time when more people will want to also engage, and we can't just have them also then, having had nothing to rely on, to start all over again. You know—it just, this isn't a way, for this—isn't the way for a movement to actually emerge and grow healthily. It doesn't mean that what we write is the law or has to be the thing that everybody adopts... but there has to be something that you can throw your thing against, your ball against, that you kind of can have a conversation alongside.

And to me, those podcasts are—can be—those, like, the thing you throw your thing against—you can listen to Dean or me talk about something, and you can be like “this is so ridiculous, it makes no sense.” And then you develop the thing that you think makes sense in respect to having heard us talk about something that you were like, “absolutely not. This does not apply to me.” But if you don't have any of that, then you don't know what you don't know. You don't know what you think about a thing until oftentimes somebody—and this is why the idea in sociology—and I will only quote sociology once, cause I—you know—I don't like people to know that I'm actually a sociologist, LOL. But one of the things is this idea of the looking glass self that you—we as human beings—we only know who we are in relation to another. And to another, not just another—you know—because we look at their thing and we're like, “we don't wanna do that. We don't wanna be that”—but rather what they reflect back to you about yourself has a huge impact on who you become. I really believe this. And so, I think it's the same about ideas—it's a “looking glass self” idea. You have this, you have a notion, maybe, of something. You look, you see it reflected back to you. You take it in, or you don't. But you have something to basically vibe with. And, to me, that's what podcasts can do. They can be helpful things for you to vibe with into developing your own ideas and your own way of

²⁹ *Community Accountability*, INCITE!, <https://perma.cc/6ALX-4EK2> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

³⁰ See MARIAME KABA & SHIRA HASSAN, *FUMBLING TOWARDS REPAIR: A WORKBOOK FOR COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY FACILITATORS* (2019).

doing things in your own way of being. But often we don't know what we don't know. And you, you need something to help you know what you don't know—you know.

[**Rachel Pincus**] 13:05:00/58:11

Yeah, that makes sense, makes a lot of sense—all of what you both just said. And I'm definitely sitting with, I do think of all the categories of things we are talking about—that podcasts are one of the easiest to, like, overload yourself with information on. And, in particular, I'm thinking about what Dean said about, like, I am pretty much constantly listening to podcasts when I'm not in the house. And that, yeah, that definitely creates in some ways—I think it's good cause I have, like, more visceral associations of where I've like learned information and taken in and thought about different ideas. Cause I'm like pretty much, always moving when I'm listening to podcasts. And in some ways, I think there is... it's nice to confine your time to take information in, at least temporally, if not also, spatially. But I think that may be—this thought is a good transition to another medium, which I think it's pretty hard to consume while you're on the go. So, I did want to talk about films which both of you have a lot of experience with in different ways. Films and videos are so important in similar ways to podcasts and other media that we've talked about—to storytelling and political education. They can be longer surveys of events and big community work,³¹ or more short, digestible explainers of theory,³² or even just personal or collective political manifestos.³³ Like some of the media that we are discussing today, they can be consumed by oneself in isolation or in community with other people. I've chosen videos that you two have played a part in producing in the resources that I sent around. But I've also learned a lot from videos made by other people that you've shared with people in the past.³⁴ Can you please talk about the importance of videos and how they convey important ideas to preserve a record of our movement organizing? And I think I'll pass this one to Dean first.

³¹ *Pinkwashing Exposed: Seattle Fights Back!*, (13th Avenue Productions 2015), <https://perma.cc/66DE-AG3E>; SYLVIA RIVERA L. PROJECT, *Toilet Training (Law and Order in the Bathroom)* (2002), <https://perma.cc/34L6-CK4Q>.

³² PROJECT NIA & BARNARD CTR. RSCH. WOMEN, *What is Transformative Justice?*, <https://perma.cc/ZV7M-ZCFF>; Dean Spade, *What is Mutual Aid?* (Classroom Version), YOUTUBE, <https://perma.cc/ECL3-A6EE>; PROJECT NIA, *Defund Police*, YOUTUBE, <https://perma.cc/TE5M-Q2PP>.

³³ Dean Spade, *Impossibility Now*, BARNARD CTR. RSCH. WOMEN (July 19, 2013), <https://perma.cc/8XLN-6FBN>.

³⁴ See, e.g., Charisse Shumate: *Fighting for Our Lives*, VIMEO (Jan. 21, 2011), <https://perma.cc/6FZD-ACEL>.

[Dean Spade]13:07:40/1:00:51

We didn't say this about podcasts, but the truth is that these days a lot of people don't read. There are many good reasons people don't like to read or, and I hear a lot of people reporting that they feel like they can't read long form things anymore because of the ways internet changed our attention spans. People need lots of charismatic ways to engage in ideas. I sometimes feel like my life purpose is to share transformative, radical ideas grounded in collaborative practice. So, if I'm trying to help make sure that as many people as possible find out about as many things as possible that might be liberating for them, we want to find ways that people will enjoy and engage with that learning.

I see that in Mariame's work and in mine? I love collaborating with visual artists—video makers and other visual artists—because that's not a set of skills I have. I'm thinking right now of Mariame's children's books. We want this stuff everywhere that it can be in as engaging to different parts of people's emotional and intellectual and spiritual and political selves as possible. I'm trying to break the spells that I think demobilize us and help more and more people feel like they can be part of something with others to make the world really open up. Two video projects I made, in particular, *Pinkwashing Exposed*³⁵ and the animated Mutual Aid explainer³⁶ were very labor-intensive and took years to make. Both are very hard to make without money, which is how we made those. I do a lot of events, as Mariame has also, with the Barnard Center for Research on Women—those events, where we record a conversation—that still takes a lot of work, but it's not the same as when someone's animating a video.

[Dean's internet cuts out]

1:03:59

Film and video are very charismatic. We made *Pinkwashing Exposed* because the idea of pinkwashing was circulating in various print sources, but we knew it would help organizers to have a more charismatic tool that tells a story. Pinkwashing is such a popular method of propaganda being used by Israel,³⁷ the US,³⁸ and by oil

³⁵ *Pinkwashing Exposed: Seattle Fights Back!*, *supra* note 30.

³⁶ Spade, *supra* note 32.

³⁷ *Say No to Pinkwashing, BDS*, <https://perma.cc/C5V9-6XH8> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

³⁸ Tapti Sen, *Combating Corporate 'Pinkwashing' During Pride Month with Mutual Aid*, INEQUALITY.ORG (July 11, 2022), <https://perma.cc/BZ3T-BCBJ>.

companies,³⁹ and by all kinds of our opponents. Creating a movie about pinkwashing, allows people to have events, free screenings, and bring the conversation to their community. 10 years later people are still doing public screenings of *Pinkwashing Exposed*, as a way to get people together to learn about Zionism, pinkwashing, and queer anti-colonial resistance. Having these kinds of tools that are event-oriented can be useful, especially when sharing concepts that people find difficult to comprehend or abstract.

[Dean's internet cuts out]

[**Mariame**] 13:12:30/1:05:42

Thanks, Dean, I was reflecting on a couple of things that you mentioned. First, I really like how you talked about—kind of what you do, like, kind of how you see yourself in in the midst of all of these things that you make and share over time. And I similarly think of my purpose in life as creating offerings basically to tap into the creativity and the insights and the wisdom of my communities, while consistently trying to extend invitations for collaboration and collective action. Like, that's kind of the way that I—you know—when everybody sees the different kinds of things I do, they don't maybe see them as connected to each other, but to me they're absolutely connected. They're all part of the same larger project—you know—and if I'm making a container for collective action that other people can join in, that is part of—you know—all of the other things that I'm doing are in service of that goal.

And so, for film, as Dean mentioned I think it's really important to say that, yes, a lot of people don't read, and a lot of people don't like reading, and a lot of people can't read. And that's also a social location and a social, a structural issue. And for those who don't like to read, there are lots of reasons for why they don't like to read. *And* we also have an—it has to be said—we have a profoundly anti-intellectual culture—in the US in particular—where intellectual ideas and a world of ideas ... is for some groups—and I think some of it is a protective thing, and some of it is really warranted—it is seen as a kind of an elite, an elite affectation or an elite thing that—you know—people that are hoity toity do or whatever. And—you know—there's a lot of kind of like—you know—"you shouldn't expect that people should read books" kind of feeling of stuff. And I understand where some of that comes from, and I think that's ludicrous. You

³⁹ Kate Yoder, *Big Oil is Awash in Rainbows for Pride Month*, SALON (June 4, 2021, 9:12 PM), <https://perma.cc/QT73-989B>.

should read books if you can and if you have access to books, and we should make access to books possible for absolutely everybody, and we should help everybody who wants to learn how to read, read well, and we should engage the written world word because it's *good*. Okay? Like, because it's a good thing to do. It's a good thing to have. It's a good thing to be able to critique the world in which you live in and to do that through other people's words can be really edifying and useful and beautiful—you know.

Like all those things are true at once. And yes, it's also elitist sometimes, and it's... but that's, like, life. Get over yourselves—you know. So, I wanna say that to say that. And because we're in that world where we have an anti-intellectual bent, because for many different, real reasons, people can't access certain kinds of ways of sharing information or information-seeking and knowledge, we have to be creating different platforms and different ways for people to engage information and knowledge. And video and film is one way, just like podcasts, just like zines—just like all the other stuff.

But what I appreciate often about film is the visual medium, the ability to have a language that isn't words, an ability to tell a story through just—you know—the photographs, the images, —that is a different kind of language, that should also be privileged. And be allowed, and people should be able to deal with—you know—just, like, listening is its own sense for some people who can hear in that kind of way. But if you can't hear, you can still sometimes read the transcripts and, if you can't read the transcripts, then maybe there are other ways that we can make information—we should use all means that we can disseminate and share information that's possible. So, film has been that for me.

I collaborated with Dean on making some videos with the BCRW,⁴⁰ Barnard Center for Research on Women, based on our Building Accountable Communities gathering that I organized back in 2019.⁴¹ And then we kind of chopped up a bunch of the interviews we were able to do there to create a series of videos. And that idea came from many years before then, when I was talking with Dean and with Hope, I think, at a café—I think you were there, you came into the city. We talked about ways that we could collaborate, and this video

⁴⁰ BARNARD CTR. RSCH. WOMEN, <https://perma.cc/4P3Q-5E2G> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

⁴¹ PROJECT NIA & BARNARD CTR. RSCH. WOMEN, *Building Accountable Communities: What is Accountability?* (Apr. 27, 2019), <https://perma.cc/9WPA-JP43>.

project came into being, and we were like “maybe we should make a bunch of videos about TJ stuff,” you know. And that’s how that came into being.

I collaborate a lot with my friend Tom Callahan,⁴² who’s a wonderful filmmaker and storyteller, and Tom and I have created a series of videos that document particular social movement-related stuff ... Tom lives in Chicago, and I lived there for many years. And so, we made for example as part of our Reparations Now campaign, we made a short video as a way to encourage people to join the reparations fight.⁴³ We created a video based on the Bye Anita campaign to uplift that campaign so more people could say goodbye to Anita Alvarez, who was the Cook County State’s Attorney. We made a video about Rekia Boyd, [who] was murder[ed] because we were trying to get people to join us as we were trying to push the Police Board to fire Dante Servin, who was the police officer who killed Rekia Boyd.⁴⁴ And, in an intentional way of moving beyond the push that people were trying to make—including the family, which we understood that they were trying to get him indicted and then they wanted him tried, and then they wanted him jailed. For many of us who were abolitionists—that wasn’t . . . our ministry, but we did think he shouldn’t be on the force to kill more people, right? That’s an abolitionist intervention. Fire the hell out of that person and take away his pension—you know—like, those were things that we could get behind in support of the family. So, we made a video showing that fight. Just things like that, which it’s like, we use those kind of visual film-like things to encourage more people to come in, encourage more people to be part of it. And it did, it brought people to us—you know—because it was like, “oh, these people are doing this stuff. I can plug in here. I feel like I can see the work in a way that I couldn’t maybe see the work before, and now I know I can actually come and join you and do more, and struggle.”

I continue to find ways to do this. For example, during 2020, we created a video with Blue Seat Studios. That was our Defund video,

⁴² See, e.g., Jenn M. Jackson, *A Discussion with Mariame Kaba on #ByeAnita Campaign and Grassroots Organizing*, BLACK YOUTH PROJECT (Nov. 29, 2016), <https://perma.cc/9T74-27CC>.

⁴³ *Video: Reparations NOW*, PRISON CULTURE (Mar. 6, 2015), <https://perma.cc/2XVD-9F8M>.

⁴⁴ Kim Bellware, *Chicago Cop Who Killed Rekia Boyd Quits, Preserving His Cushy Retirement*, HUFFPOST (May 17, 2016, 8:30 PM), <https://perma.cc/7XPB-VHA3>.

our Defund Police video.⁴⁵ It was an animated short, and it was out of deep frustration with how people kept saying they couldn't wrap their brains around the concept of defunding police, right? I was like, "really? a child's can." And so, when Blue Seat reached out to me after that, they were like, "we can make an animated video" and I was like, "let's make an animated video that shows that actually a ten-year-old understands defund, right?" So, always trying to find ways to communicate with people in ways that make it more accessible. And also encourage them to join us, encourage them to take part, to be part of this. I don't want to make films that are about people looking at the work we're doing in a voyeuristic and consumptive, spectacle-like way. I want people to be drawn into the fight with us, and everything that I make, and movies are no different.

[**Rachel Pincus**] 13:20:44/1:13:55

I think you both raise a lot of good points about the purpose of film and video, and also the accessibility, which I guess was sort of the framework that I tried to bring to this. But it did occur to me—and thinking about our next categories—one thing that I left out was visual notes, which I think is a really good medium to think about in terms of maybe a bridge between films, and, like, animated or visual media—but something sort of trying to record the big themes and maybe a conversation or webinar in a way that actually works for people who, like, can't or don't want to, or don't have the time to read. But I definitely agree that we need to—I think—try to convey these ideas in as many different ways as possible, but that is kind of my little segue into talking about syllabi and study guides.

So, you're both educators who have made collective study a big part of your political practice. I remember seeing both of you post syllabi for formal classes you've taught,⁴⁶ or essential reading lists,⁴⁷ and even event- or movement- inspired collections of resources⁴⁸ which I would definitely call syllabi. I believe most of your nonfiction books have associated study guides,⁴⁹ and I think some of them are kind of

⁴⁵ *Project NIA Presents: Defund the Police*, PROJECT NIA (Oct. 24, 2020), <https://perma.cc/VJ7B-F5BD>.

⁴⁶ *See, e.g.*, Dean Spade, *Law and Social Movements Spring 2012 Syllabus*, <https://perma.cc/W8UN-JVAD>.

⁴⁷ *See, e.g.*, *Essential Reading*, US PRISON CULTURE BLOG (Oct. 30, 2010), <https://perma.cc/DCA5-9D44>.

⁴⁸ *See, e.g.*, *#FergusonSyllabus: Talking and Teaching About Police Violence*, US PRISON CULTURE BLOG (Aug. 31, 2014), <https://perma.cc/F8SQ-QJRY>.

⁴⁹ *Curriculum*, RACHEL ZAFAR, <https://perma.cc/H4HL-3SFR> (listing study guides which include those for No More Police and We Do This 'Til We Free Us) (last

what I talked about—a little more visual, definitely, like, breaking down the idea in visual ways. But they also collect tons of sources for further study through, like, bibliographies or whatever it's called. Can you speak to the importance of curating lists of resources for formal and self-education? Especially in the current, but not particularly new or unique climate of censorship, like what we're seeing and Florida in particular,⁵⁰ but lots of places all over.⁵¹ Some people have suggested that political stunts to censor Black feminist and queer theorists will only increase people's acquaintance with them.⁵²

[**Dean Spade**]13:23:45/1:16:54

The political climate of censorship is important, and I think also the political climate of co-optation is where my mind went with this question. Because part of what happens when we have explosive social movement moments, is then our opposition—and people who don't know they're part of our opposition but just have like bad, liberal ideas—put out a bunch of nonsense that's says it's gonna answer or refer to or explain what's needed in the face of the crises that have been made more visible by the social movement at a moment of uprising or insurrection. There is a lot of liberal reformist material out there saying it's addressing whatever the topic is that's likely easier to find than the actual radical stuff, because it's getting published by corporate media, or it's got government money behind it, or it's got people who already have a big platform.

Part of the role of, social movements study groups and syllabi, is getting to make sure we find texts or resources that we might not have found that give a deeper, broader context, more history, or that give a more radical view, or that come from people impacted by the issue, who are not going to be heard from in mainstream accounts. And the most obvious example of this is that, when we have these moments over the last many years, where there's greater attention to

visited Mar. 4, 2023); August Devore Welles, *Mutual Aid: A Study Guide of Dean Spade's 2020 Book 'Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis and the Next'*, RADICAL IN PROGRESS, <https://perma.cc/ZJS9-TPF7>.

⁵⁰ *Freedom to Learn: Nat'l Day of Action Targets Ron DeSantis, "Anti-Woke Cabal" over Boko Bans and More*, DEMOCRACY NOW! (May 5, 2023), <https://perma.cc/ALF8-KF8C>.

⁵¹ Rashawn Ray & Alexandra Gibbons, *Why Are States Banning Critical Race Theory?*, BROOKINGS (Nov. 2021), <https://perma.cc/5PKG-AKF3>.

⁵² See, e.g., Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Khalil Gibran Muhammad & E. Patrick Johnson on the Fight over Black History, DEMOCRACY NOW! (Feb. 3, 2023), <https://perma.cc/B3TT-8YAR> (including E. Patrick Johnson's statement: "I also thought it was ironic that the fact that we've been removed means, actually, in some ways, more students will have access, because now people are doing searches for our work.").

the violence of the criminal punishment system; whether that's 2016 Mike Brown being killed, or all these other explosive moments, you just instantly get a bunch of stuff put out there by liberals and reformers, and you might never get the abolitionist analysis if you don't find that set of books, podcasts, zines, websites, films.

I love seeing what people read together. There is a lot out there, and there's so much that all of us don't know about. There's so many histories and so many places and times in which we could study resistance. Getting to see how someone learned something, what they read, what influenced them, is so fun and generative. I teach primarily law students at a not elite school, and my students have a variety of levels of reading comprehension. I'm often looking for short, charismatic pieces full of examples that help someone who is new to critical thinking. Right now, I am thinking of how I enjoy teaching this book *Remaking Radicalism*, which is an anthology that came out a few years ago.⁵³ It covers lots of different movement moments over two decades, and the editors carefully excerpted one-pagers or two-pagers, that various movements were putting out. Very short, and readable, but these items let you into important debates and framings and calls to action. Those kinds of punchy short materials from social movements are great for my students, and they come from careful archival work.

Reading and anthologies because anthologies have been vital to my teaching—for example the *INCITE!*⁵⁴—and also to the activist groups I've been a part of. I love how these often provide short version of work that people can then dig into further if they want. I'm thinking of how Dorothy Roberts' essay in *Color of Violence* is a very short version of her essential critiques of the family policing system that people can read first before diving into her huge body of work.

Political reading groups with other organizers—not through school—have been essential to my political development. They have developed and changed my thinking more than anything else. Circulating syllabi, sharing what we are reading with each other, and what goes together, is so generative.

[**Mariame**] 13:28:41/1:21:53

⁵³ REMAKING RADICALISM: A GRASSROOTS DOCUMENTARY READER OF THE UNITED STATES, 1973-2001 (Dan Berger & Emily K. Hobson eds., 2020).

⁵⁴ *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology*, AMP STORE, <https://perma.cc/RRB6-FLEX> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

Wonderful! Yes to all of that. I started teaching—I was in my early twenties; I taught my first high school social studies class. I was a terrible teacher. I was 22; I was almost the age of my students; I was teaching in Harlem. I’ve been teaching ever since in formal and informal settings—taught high school, college age students. I taught a night class of immigrant, African immigrants years ago in Chicago. I have taught a lot, and I see myself—I have always seen myself as a teacher/organizer. Like, that’s kind of the—if I had to, like, when people ask me, “what do you do?” I’m like, “yeah. I teach.” That’s how I’ve always seen myself in my work. And so, for me, it’s a logical extension of that to create curriculum. I learned how to create curriculum when I was really young, and a lot of people don’t know how to create curriculum. And that’s a thing that you learned as well—it’s not easy to figure out what pieces go together and to make sure that people can do an activity that actually gets them to get to what you want them to get to in the end—you know. Like, these things don’t just happen.

I think it’s been, it’s been interesting. People have done the so—you know—ever since Marcia Chatelain and others started doing, like, the Charleston syllabus,⁵⁵ and the “this syllabus,” and the “that syllabus,” people think that reading lists are curriculum, and they are not. Reading lists can be an archive, but they are not a curriculum per se, because you’re not taking people through the activities that are needed for them to internalize the information you provided—that’s a curriculum, right? And so, we can do both. We can do both and then some, and it’s good to have all of the different things going on. And when friends of mine, my friend Rachel Herzing always says, “Mariame, please, don’t make another curriculum on this thing, like, let somebody else do it.” . . . And I’m always saying to her accordingly—she knows this is true— “who’s doing it, though? Who’s doing it to make it public for people who aren’t in a university classroom to use. Like, where are people, where are all these curricula that are being created around the topics we care about? So people can access it beyond formal education structures, right?”

And so, I would like to not ever make another curriculum again. Frankly when I finished my *Against Punishment* curriculum⁵⁶ a couple of years ago, I was like, “I’m done. I’m really exhausted.” It took me so long to work on that—like, years. It took me years—took

⁵⁵ *Charleston Syllabus*, UNIV. OF G.A. PRESS, <https://perma.cc/5Y2J-5NNZ> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

⁵⁶ *Against Punishment: A Resource by Project NIA and Interrupting Criminalization*, PROJECT NIA (Dec. 2, 2020), <https://perma.cc/XZX7-7RJK>.

years to work on it, years then to perfect it to what I felt was good and then releasing it in that kind of fashion. And I have to say, the reason it took me years was because I was trying out all the things that are in there. I was trying out through workshops some of the activities that are in there, and then figuring out which ones were good, and then which ones weren't getting me somewhere. So, whatever's included in there isn't just stuff that I threw in there that I haven't actually tried to teach first. That's the other part that I think is important about curriculum development is: has your curriculum intervention actually been used by you to do the things that you say it can actually do in the classroom or community, right? So, these are all important things that I'd like to make sure that I that I point out.

And I think this is another important part too, is that the reading lists that Dean has put out, the reading lists that I have put out—you know that is in the tradition of a lot of librarians. People like Dorothy Porter,⁵⁷ who was a pioneer in—you know—LIS (Library and Information Sciences), who put together these really in-depth—at a time when Black people's knowledge production was being actively suppressed, neglected, or ignored—put together all these reading lists of all these books that were written by Black people worldwide. That's how we know about those books, that they existed. And she did it too at Howard—you know—kind of Mecca of Black education in some ways in the US. You go back today, and you look at those reading lists—a lot of those books are out of print. We never would have known the books existed because the books don't—they're not, they don't all survive, but we can try to look for them now because of those lists. Do you see what I'm saying?

That means—I don't think people think about that enough—which is, like, you collecting a whole bunch of names of zines that probably are no longer circulating, having that on your reading list means somebody else in the future is going to be looking for topics on trans stuff, is going to go back and look for that, that particular interesting zine on trans—you know—history or trans stories. And they may or may not find it, but they know it existed because somebody put together that really exhaustive, wonderful catalog and document archive of a reading list.

The last thing I want to say on this—and you know this, Rachel, because you know a big part of the spaces I'm in, I always say we

⁵⁷ Zita Cristina Nunes, *Remembering the Howard University Librarian Who Decolonized the Way Books Were Catalogued*, SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE (Nov. 26, 2018), <https://perma.cc/8MGS-Z72R>.

must have political education and it must be included in the structure of how we work together, which is why in SPNY (Survived & Punished NYC), and other spaces I've always been in—you know, SPNY has a political education hour at the beginning of every membership meeting, and that is because—it is not mandatory that everybody attend that, but it must be there every single month to remind people of the importance of political education, and be there as a time and space for those who do want to gather together and study together and think together and read together, for them to have that as a structural part of how we meet. Because that tells you what our values are, and it also shows us what we think is important in the work we do together. And if you don't make those spaces a place that is always in existence within your organizations and spaces... it's like a habit—you know—that becomes formed. *Now* I will assure you of the hundreds of people who come through our work over time at SPNY, they're gonna, when they go to their new other homes of organizing, some are gonna bring that with them. And they are gonna also remember that that is something that ought to happen where they are, and they will continue to do that, and they will bring in a whole new generation of other people who are going to keep doing that because it's important to do. But you have to model it. You have to make it part of the structure, and you have to do it—you know. So those are—that is very, very important. It's not about, it's not accidental to organize your stuff the way you have—you know—you have to have an intention behind it, because it actually matters to you. So, yeah.

[**Rachel Pincus**] 13:35:40/1:28:54

On that note of making space—or including something as a practice of what's important to your organizing and to your social movements—I think that is a really good segue into our last sort of category, which is—I picked posters, but I think our art more generally can be the thing that we talk about. I think in a lot of the media that we've talked about so far—in the political education that we've talked about—I think, making it artistic or visually pleasing can sometimes give way to trying to convey as much information as possible, or even sometimes too much information; really valuing the written word over other ways of expressing things. So, I did want to talk about art and acknowledge that it is really important to our social movements, and, as I kind of just said, it appears in pretty much every medium we've discussed so far. It's arguably one of the smallest units of information that we've discussed—posters are usually one page. Sometimes there will be series of posters or our pieces that do a collective lift of conveying a certain idea or theme, but it honestly might be—as far as, like, one-unit items go—it might

be the most appropriate thing that we've talked about in terms of discussing archives. And . . . if we were thinking about how someone very far in the future will look back at all of our projects, like—what are the things that will survive? And I think MK did talk about this earlier—the actual, like, physical media that we print on now are just such shit that—like a lot of books—we have other things that we have might not make it. But I think art is something that, depending on what exact medium it is, might be a lot more long-lasting. So, I think—maybe thinking about the actual visual aspect of this, and then maybe the durability of the format, would be a good way to think about the importance of art and posters to our social movements. And I think one particular framework that I gave for this was posters are really important to participatory defense campaigns⁵⁸ and protests—⁵⁹ I think—as very concrete examples of how they show up in our social movements. But as I did say at the beginning of this intro: I think they show up in a lot of our movement work and political education.

[Dean Spade]13:38:56/1:32:07

It's funny because I'm not thinking about the archival value right now. What I've been thinking while you were talking [was] about a few different projects—like this project that has been ongoing since 2017 called “Queer Trans War Ban,” where we create anti-police and anti-militarism sticker designs and poster designs, zines, and also print stickers and posters and flyers and distribute them at queer events.⁶⁰ It emerged as a response to the debates about queer and trans military service and the horrid framing by military inclusion advocates that the military is a “good job” that we should seek inclusion into. Our goals have been to both do anti-military recruitment work and to try to support a queer political culture that wants to abolish immigration enforcement, police and prisons, and the military. We collaborated with artists to create these sticker and poster designs that people can print themselves wherever they live to distribute, and we also print a lot of them and mail them out to people.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Victoria Law, *21,000 Supporters Urge Alvin Bragg to Free Tracy McCarter*, NATION (Oct. 25, 2022), <https://perma.cc/UZ3C-4SYS>. Tracy McCarter's supporters are depicted donning red campaign sweatshirts and holding posters with an artistic rendering of McCarter's face and the text “Drop her charges!” and “Free Tracy.”

⁵⁹ See, for example, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative's collections of downloadable graphics, categorizable by issue. *Black Lives Matter*, <https://perma.cc/X3YM-CMZF>; *Standing Rock & No DAPL*, <https://perma.cc/43QL-RZ4S>; *Palestine*, <https://perma.cc/VT5X-GV7M>.

⁶⁰ *Queer Trans War Ban*, <https://perma.cc/J264-2Z6W> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

These kinds of giveaways can create a moment of belonging and engagement where we meet new people, talk to people about these politics, invite people in. We're trying to make a queer/trans entry point for people into a more radical politics that includes whatever local campaigns we're doing that are anti-racist or anti-carceral and anti-military. The moment of getting a sticker, putting it on your water bottle or your notebook, having this poster in your house, this can be a chance for people to try on this politics for the first time, to be invited in.

In *Queers Against Israeli Apartheid* in Seattle we created matchbooks that were gold and shiny that said an anti-colonial message inside and we handed them out in gay bars and talked to people about pinkwashing. I am interested in how movement groups use those kinds of moments and objects to share ideas and pull people in, often via social connection and social space.

I'm also remembering when the Republican National Convention came to New York—I guess it was 2004—and the DNC was in Philly, and so a lot of us were doing a lot of organizing and being at the various events surrounding that. And we wanted to intervene on some of the things happening inside. Even those protests with other protesters, like—we wanted to insert an abolitionist message or insert a queer and trans liberation message in spaces that might have liberal politics or might have a really limited anti-war politics. Oftentimes, we're intervening in our own movements and moments handing out zines in larger protest spaces like that, trying to share ideas within those spaces where people have mobilized. And also having moments where people refuse to take what you are offering—I've had many moments of people at Pride events refusing to take abolitionist stickers—and that gives us useful information on what people are thinking and what work needs to be done.

Like, I remember there was one year where a lot of queer and trans events around the country during pride season, people I knew—we were sharing sticker designs and we were all handing out a sticker that was anti-cop and also a sticker that was against Islamophobia and people would take the Islamophobia, but they wouldn't take the cop one. It was in the early twenty-teens sometimes, and I remember comparing notes with people in other cities and thinking together about what this might mean about what political education was needed in our communities in that moment and how to do it. What's going to bridge people into the politics that we are trying to share, and what's the invitation that's gonna delight them enough and make

them curious enough that they'll take it from you? Even just the process of being a friendly hander-outer of these items and testing out being rejected, being kind, talking to strangers, is such a useful skill set.

These objects, these beautiful objects or these brightly colored objects really matter. But they are not lasting—they mostly end up in the trash after the water bottle or the notebook is done. I have absolutely loved seeing those things in archives of feminist organizing or queer, trans organizing over the years. Those objects are doing for that person receiving them that's different than reading something. They have this item that is a movement item that belongs to them, that they can consider, display[ing] that might yield a different sense of belonging in that movement.

[Mariame] 13:44:32/1:37:44

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for that, Dean. There's a book that I really love, that I sometimes give to people that is called *Making the Movement: How Activists Fought for Civil Rights with Buttons, Flyers, Pins, and Posters*.⁶¹ It's a book by David Crane, and it is—everybody should just have a copy of it to read and look at, because it shows the way that movements have done exactly what Dean was mentioning around creating buttons and fliers, and you'll see buttons that the NAACP made in 1916 that say “stop lynching”—you know—small buttons that have the NAACP's “stop lynching” slogan on them. Like—why did they make that? Why did they hand those out to people—their members and beyond—like what mattered about that? Because people like getting stuff and because propaganda matters and getting that—you know—making art, that is propagandist art is really helpful to moving and advancing our causes.

You know—I'm trying to always say, like, one of my pieces of my life's work is to push people to imagine—you know—a world without prisons and policing. Art plays a huge, huge role in that. Because I started incorporating art into my organizing work before I knew it was a conscious choice. And, years ago, I remember reading Jeff Chang saying that cultural change precedes political change.⁶² And that has a lot to do with kind of the importance of what art does in the world, whether it's film or—you know—other kinds of visual

⁶¹ DAVID L. CRANE, *MAKING THE MOVEMENT: HOW ACTIVISTS FOUGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS WITH BUTTONS, FLYERS, PINS, AND POSTERS* (2022).

⁶² Kanyakrit Vongkiatkajorn, *Here's a Really Smart Take on Racial Politics in America Right Now*, MOTHER JONES (Oct. 5, 2016), <https://perma.cc/KV3D-L6PA>.

arts. Because all of—and this is also Chang’s idea about, kind of, all of the major social changes in the world require what he called, like, a collective leap of imagination. And that imagination has to be seeded and grown. And how to do that is—you know—oftentimes it’s through . . . art, through ways that people can connect together. And I think . . . what Chang speaks to is just one reason for why art is necessary in social movements. I also contend that actually, social movements are themselves a form of collective artmaking. If you’re paying attention to some of the most important movements in our generation, in our time—whether it’s Black Lives Matter or the Standing Rock, or Occupy, or all of those different movements that have occurred—I think you’ll agree, right? So much in our movements is reactionary, but art really pushes us to be visionary—and that, to me, is so, so, so important to think about.

You know—artists are well-positioned to help us to create new things, and that’s what movement making is: creation of lots of different kinds of things. I think art can be such a catalyst for that, and for that kind of work—you know. I don’t know—how do we think about anything else but policing and prisons when we’ve been indoctrinated with the idea that that is how all of the problems have been solved? I think art can be key to removing the ceilings from our imaginations, right? In order to allow us to be able to conceptualize or think through something different, something else, something different and better than what we currently have going for us.

And I think the last thing I’ll say is art—often in a way that I don’t see other things being able to do in a similar way—years ago, I read—I really like Jeanette Winterson—and Jeanette Winterson had said something to the effect that art really makes a difference because it pulls people up short, and it says to folks, you don’t have to accept things at face value. You don’t have to go along with any of this shit. You can think for yourself. You can dream for yourself. You can build for yourself—you know—like that these are thing—I’m paraphrasing, and this is not all—she said, but you know she has that notion that it has the power to disrupt, and we want *desperately* disruption in our punishment culture. That’s the whole point—we have to disrupt the way people are thinking, that this is natural. This is the way things have always been, this is how they’re always going to be—you know. And so, in the end—to me—that it’s controversial to say, but, like, to me “art to me is only important to the extent that it aids in the liberation of our people.”⁶³ And I didn’t say that, Elizabeth

⁶³ *Elizabeth Catlett Portrayed by Ilene Evans*, VOICES FROM THE EARTH, <https://perma.cc/HJF3-P783> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

Catlett did. You know—and a lot of artists don't think that, that their work is not supposed to be political in that way. They could just do shit for art's sake and whatever. Good—do that. Whatever I might have, I might admire your work from afar, but that's not the business I'm in around why art matters—you know. And yeah, yeah, I think those are some of the thoughts I have about [that].

All right, in terms of art and archives, I mean Interference Archive⁶⁴ is doing amazing work of preserving and making accessible the art of movement and the cultural production of movement. If people are interested in the way that that work is being archived, they should go and check out Interference Archive. It's a community archive—their mission—and the way that you feel comfortable in there, you can actually touch all the materials there—in fact . . . I've donated to them over the years—they tell you, “don't donate things that are one of a kind—you know.” They're like “don't donate things that are super precious here, we're not here for preciousness. We're here for using these archives as inspiration to fuel the next generation of struggle—you know—so that people who come in here and are looking for stuff might be inspired to create stuff for this current moment, right?” So, like, you can go and touch all the buttons there, you can pull down all the stuff . . . that you want yourself from the shelves—there's nobody surveilling you, there are no cameras inside to make sure you didn't steal anything, that is how the archives are generally structured, as a surveillance panopticon. You know—Foucault style, you gotta go show your ID. . . you don't have to show your ID when you go to Interference Archive—you don't have to. You can just walk in off the street and be like “Yo, I wanna see some posters,” and they're like, “Here, go over there.” Right? Like, that should be what our archives are, if you're gonna have them anywhere. Anyway, don't let me go off. I mean, I can go off on this for a long time, because this is a pet peeve of mine around how information from movements is made inaccessible to the very same movement people later. Like, why are we putting it in behind lock and key somewhere and not allowing people to use the very thing that the people who made the shit in the first place wanted it to be used? Very frustrating.

[**Rachel Pincus**] 13:51:50/1:45:00

I mean, we could listen to you go off for hours, probably, but I do think that sentiment is a good place to maybe invite any last big thoughts that either of you have about archives. I do wanna be mindful that—I'm so appreciative that you two have been here for

⁶⁴ *Interference Archive*, <https://perma.cc/C2NH-BBB3> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

almost two hours and have really filled up this space with a lot of ideas, and I do also want to open it up to other people to ask questions before you have to hop off.

....

[Kimberly Fong] 13:52:43/1:45:57

Okay. So, I have two questions, and but—well, one of them I discussed with Rachel. So, Rachel, I guess I'll start it and you can add to it if you want. Okay. So, one is that when I learned about this conversation, it immediately made me think of Corky Lee,⁶⁵ who was really important to Asian Americans and just showing the public that—you know—yes, Asian Americans are engaged in political activity. He unfortunately died early in the pandemic and wasn't able to get vaccinated in time. So—you know—with that—you know—with Corky Lee's death in mind, and then also for me, I kind of think about how—you know—in some parts of New York City, let's say, Chinese-Americans are kind of not as united as would be helpful in some ways, so I was wondering if you two would have any guidance about producing material that you think could bring a group that's, at times, divided together, and then also be able to further amplify the group's voice. So, that's the first question, and then, right after, maybe I could ask the second question.

[Dean Spade]13:54:22

Our movements are about trying to influence each other. There is an incredibly conservative mainstream, but highly visible, heavily funded queer and trans politics out there that's pro-police, pro-military, pro-capitalist and centers white, upper-class people. I spent my life trying to be like "that's not queer and trans politics, this other thing is." We see similar battles in every movement, battles about what these fights are for, who they are for, how disruptive they will be. And we're all trying to move other people who have something in common with us towards the things that we think are actually more beneficial to our well-being, and our opponents are doing the same thing. They are telling people that cops or hate crime laws or getting married are the answer. That's what community organizing and political education is—trying to be like "no, we think that actually, we have this history of resistance in us. And actually, we have these impacts of these systems that we're confronting, and that this is a

⁶⁵ Hua Hsu, *Corky Lee's Photographs Helped Generations of Asian-Americans See Themselves*, NEW YORKER (Jan. 30, 2021), <https://perma.cc/PT49-B8FX>; *Corky Lee*, N.Y. HIST. SOC'Y, <https://perma.cc/KBN2-WCG6> (last visited Aug. 19, 2023).

mistake, this answer that our opponents are offering [in response] to our needs for well-being and security and belonging and survival.”

Ultimately, the people we are best able to influence are those who are closest to us. I notice this a lot when I meet people are just starting to organize—they imagine that they wanna reach people who they don’t know at all. They want to change the minds of elected officials, or billionaires, or the imagined audience of mainstream media. The people we can best engage are the people who share spaces or communities with us—our faith, our neighborhood, any part of our background, any part of our identities, our occupation. That’s who we can reach—people who we already have some kind of access or contact with. We have some kind of shared reference points. These are battles about ideas and about actions. We’re all trying to mobilize each other to hopefully do stuff . . . that we think is beneficial and that takes collective action. We need everybody.

[**Mariame**] 13:57:03/1:50:14

Thanks, Dean. I would just say—I’m against unity, so I think I wanna start there. I don’t believe in it. I don’t think it’s achievable. I don’t know why I want to be unified with random people that I have zero in common with. I am pro-solidarity, which is different—and not solidarity as a market exchange as Robin D.G. Kelley says⁶⁶—right? Like. . . I am pro figuring out strategic alliances over time and coming together and then breaking up. I think that’s how the world operates. I don’t think we need unity, and I don’t think we need to strive for it. I think striving for it will just make you very miserable, because you’re—let’s give the Chinese-American example that you talked about, Kimberly. You know—how different is the Chinese-American community internally? Whether it’s people who just got here yesterday versus people who’ve been here since the nineteenth century—these are not the same groups. They’re just not. They happen to be subsumed under the same racial category. But these aren’t: they don’t have the same interests; they maybe don’t have the same culture. Maybe people who came here in the nineteenth century don’t even speak Chinese, like—what is the point at which we are seeking solidarity with each other?

And so, I think about, I knew about Corky Lee because I’m from New York. I was born and raised in New York, and Corky Lee’s work was synonymous with—in a certain crew of folks who ran together in the 1980s and 90s. We knew of his documenting Vincent Chin’s, the

⁶⁶ BLACK INK, “*Solidarity is Not a Market Exchange*”: *An Interview With Robin D.G. Kelley*, BLACK INK (Jan. 16, 2020), <https://perma.cc/U8N2-DKSW>.

protests on Vincent Chin being killed when I was still a kid, about what—11 . . . or 12 years old at that point. We knew about his documentation of the huge Chinatown mobilization that happened in the 90s against police brutality and violence, and we saw those photographs—even though he was a freelancer—saw those photographs, and that was what kind of got us—you know—a lot of my friends who were Asian-American, who were the ones who were in solidarity with Black people. They held him in high esteem, and that was enough to understand why his work would be of... but those people were having strategic alliances with me. They were not strategically aligning with their parents who were, in fact, like, “why the fuck are you hanging out with these Black folks?” Right? There is a huge, huge amount of anti-Blackness writ large in the US, but it exists across every ethnic group, okay?

And so, the young folks who are Asian-American who were fighting alongside us on state violence issues were often ostracized in their own communities for doing so. But I had a lot more in common with those folks than I had in common with—you know—any number of other people who were, just because they also are being marginalized, we supposedly have so much stuff in common. We don't. We might be able to have solidarity with each other across difference—that should be something we strive for. But we're never gonna be unified. So, I think that's what I wanna say about that. I hope that answers your question.

[Kimberly Fong] 14:00:24

No, thank you. It does. I think that's—I think solidarity is a better way to put it. And I had been kind of thinking about—you know—just trying to—you know—amplify the power, I guess, politically, of Asian-Americans, when a lot of times I just feel like—you know—politicians, like, don't take the Asian-American bloc—which, and again, it is very different—seriously. And I also think it's helpful to think about—you know—trying to influence the people who are closer to you also, as well as what Dean said.

[Mariame] 14:01:18/1:54:24

One question for you, though, is: is there an Asian-American bloc? That's the thing I don't like—which Asian-American groups are we talking about? Because a lot of Vietnamese folks living in Minneapolis have closer connections to Black people, to the Black “bloc” on a certain level than they would to the Desi block. Of doctors from Atlanta who are hyper-conservative, do you know what I mean?

[Kimberly Fong] 14:01:43/1:54:54

Yeah, I do. I mean, you know, I sort of. I think that there is some, I think—you know—I think that there is kind of, there are some qualities and some shared, kind of, issues—you know—just like generationally, for instance. I think that—you know—I think that Asian Americans are, Asian Americans—you know—oppose, like really harsh immigration policies, for instance, just kind of given Japanese Americans' history of being incarcerated, and I think that—you know—. . . so, I think that younger Asian Americans are generally a little are more liberal. And then the older generation is less so. But I know, I mean—I totally understand that there are a lot of cultural differences as well and really, like, outreach should be sensitive to those differences and responsive to them. . . .

[Kim asks a question about TikTok, to which Dean and MK both don't have an answer and Dean leaves.]

. . . .

[Karen Adelman (she/they)] 14:06:21/1:59:33

Thank you. Hi, yeah, I do have a question, and thank you so much for coming to speak with us. My question is kind of around the issue of anonymity, I guess in general, which I feel like, has, I have, like several questions around it, or I feel like it goes in very different directions. Because I really love what you were both saying about, like, that the anonymity can sort of make you free to sort of muse about things you might not be free to talk about, and there's certainly—speaking of surveillance—concerns around people, like, coming for you, like, doxing is an issue that I was, like, talking about in one of my classes recently and, like, how it kind of raises these questions around, like, speech and making more speech and then also the potential for people to kind of harm. And I was actually, I've read some of your work—I will say—and I was actually, I'm someone who has liked to be, like, anonymous. Like, I was a vocal performer for a long time, and I had a fake, a different version of my name that I would use for that, but I was really moved by what you had written at some point about coming to, to attribution more for yourself, that people had encouraged you to think about attribution as a way of putting some of these markers in place. Like you were saying about a text that might not exist anymore, but we at least know it existed—and that the loss of the name of people would sort of, like, remove a thread of continuity that could be helpful for people later. And that even more anonymity was sometimes the shield for people whose voices would ordinarily be silenced, and that there is something to say for, like, standing up and having more of those voices in the conversation. So, I guess just sort of like in the way that anonymity

can be both protective and also keeping us from sort of other connection, like, if you could just talk about how that sort of plays out right now.

[**Mariame**] 14:08:02/2:01:15

Yes, yes, yes, thank you, Karen. Yes, I've had a very fraught relationship with a public presence in the world. I grew up in movement, being taught by people who told us all and drilled it into us, it was organizers in the back, leaders up front. And you as an organizer were a background player, and the leaders that were cultivated were the ones who took step[s] forward. And those leaders had to be the people who were most impacted by the various things that you were fighting for, so I really—it was drilled in me. I also heard a lot about COINTELPRO, and—you know—surveillance and the fact that if you're always up front, you're not only gonna be more vulnerable to being taken out, but you also are in a position where you're gonna have to worry about things in a different kind of way.

So, I grew up in that world, and I also grew up in the world where—as I mentioned to you all before—I was a zinester from a young age where DIY culture was really like non-attribution. You know—you just kind of use what you use, it didn't matter who made it—it was like information activism at its finest—you know. And so, I grew up in those cultures and those cultures made me, so I just was doing my work—I was just doing my work constantly in the background. I was making all this stuff; I wasn't putting my name on it. I was creating all this stuff. It wasn't until a friend of mine confronted me—when I was probably in my mid-30s at that point—and said something to me that really pierced me. And it was a friend who was like, “you know—it's interesting to me that you spend so much of your time reclaiming the work of Black women of the past in various ways—historically and lifting up their work and naming them and all that other kind of stuff—and you have invisibilized yourself.” And I was like—you know—first of all, I didn't realize—I didn't, I don't, I really didn't think about it that way at all. It was like a gut punch. I mean, not only that, but you know she's a very good friend of mine, of long standing, and she's white. And this also had an impact on me, for lots of reasons which I won't get into—not because it hurt me in any kind of way, but I was like, “hmm, I do probably have a responsibility particularly to a lot of young people that I support in developing their leadership.” If I'm erasing myself from those lineages, and that what you read about—you talked about, Rachel, around the kind of genealogies of art—you know—of struggle. Like, I—they know me, and they know what I meant to them. But, no, my work isn't gonna be visible to those who come after. They won't be

able to discover it. They don't know [about] all the curriculum I've written without putting my name on it.

So, it really—it sent me in a little bit of a spiral for a few years—actually, a good three years, I think—of really soul searching around the question of “what did I, how did I—you know—how do I make?” And this was before I had a blog, and so you—even at that point, when I had my blog, I called it—“Prison Culture—I didn't put my name on it, so you can see I was still struggling with that over time, and I still struggle with it, if I'm to be honest. But for all the reasons that you mentioned before, ... I realized, I think I had to step into taking responsibility and accountability for the work I actually put out in the world the more people started to know who I was. That it kind of was shifty if I didn't attribute ideas that I had to myself, like, because nobody could argue with them and come back to me and say, “this is bullshit,” or even hold me to account, call me in call me in if I'm making a bunch of arguments that are hurtful, or harmful, or whatever—like no one could reach you if you're anonymous.

And I thought that outweighed all the other stuff that comes with not being anonymous, which are very serious things—you mentioned doxing—I mean, I've been so, I've had so many things happen to me. I live with weekly death threats. I am—you know—like I've had to change how I live in my world, even though I've always known I've been surveilled by the Government in different ways. And that's not any sort of paranoia, that's just fact, like, I know my work has been surveilled for a long time, but it's different when some rando on the internet can get at you.

So, yeah, so I say all that to say that I really feel a sense of responsibility; I think about it a lot. I wrestle with it every day. I don't appear on television on purpose. I don't like to be on camera. I don't like my photo to be posted—there's three photos of me, probably, on the internet circulating—by necessity at this point. That's it—you know. So, I don't think—I don't know if that answers your question, but it does tell you how it's been a struggle for me, and it hasn't been straightforward, but I know I owe it to, I do owe it to my communities to at least be known as the person who did the thing, because I should take all of the criticisms along with whatever accolades might [arise].

[**Rachel Pincus**] 14:13:42/2:06:54

Thank you, MK. I think I'm gonna pass it to Marcus for our final question—hopefully it's quick.

[**Mariame**] 14:13:48/2:07:02

Okay, great. No, no worries; it's fine. Hi, Marcus!

[**Marcus Hyde** (he/him)] 14:13:54/2:07:07

So first, hey! Thanks so much for this, and thanks to Dean also. So, my question is about, like, misinformation and claiming narratives, and how that plays with anonymity. And I'll just say—I grew up in the punk community and, like, there was a lot of zines—and I don't know if this is true of all zine culture—but my feeling is that there was less ill-intentioned kind of misinformation—

[**Mariame**]

Yes.

[**Marcus**]

—with anonymous zines than we have with current, like, online anonymous information sharing. And yeah, so I'm just curious, like—one, is that just because zines take time and care, and they are more creative like that? Or... and then—you know—what are your thoughts about, like, how do we maintain, how do we allow people who are actually from a community to name their narrative and not be co-opted by bad actors?

[**Mariame**] 14:15:17/2:08:29

Yeah, what a question. I think I would say the difference between zine culture and internet culture at large is that zine culture was a culture that, was a very coherent culture in the sense that—even though we have, we had different interests—you know—there were the punks and the DIY kind of culture makers, and the artists, and activists, movement people, like, all that. The reason you made zines was because you wanted to communicate your truth. I really felt like that's important. People weren't, you weren't gonna spend all their time figuring out where to go to Kinko's, making the photocopies, cutting the shit out—like, the stuff you have to do to make your project—it was like you were a maker of a thing that took time and energy and investment, and it was because you were trying to communicate in some way, whether it was trying to communicate feelings you had, or a sense of your politics, or history, or art, or whatever—you were trying to communicate with other people.

So, there was, there was a satisfaction of at least having your truth—you know—represented in there. Now, if you're on, like, the internet, and you're spouting off on stuff, you can do it in two seconds. No one needs to know. You can have a fake screen name. You can, like—you know—it's just different. It's not—I just think it's a different

kind of consideration, a different medium, a different culture—all of those things together. And to make something takes a lot out of you. And if you're gonna make something, you're going to be less likely to invest a whole bunch of time for evil. In my opinion, you just are, even though people do evil things and make evil things—they like to do evil things quickly and without—you know—precision and then keep it moving. It's different in that way. So, that's what I would say about it. Thank you for your question.

[Rachel Pincus] 14:17:16/2:10:27

Thank you. I feel like that's a great place to leave it. So yeah, I just want to say thanks again for taking so much time to share with us and talk about archives.

[Mariame] 14:17:26/2:11:13

Absolutely. It is my pleasure, and thank you for the invitation—and I always like to talk about archives. So, that's a good way to get me to talk about anything—so, smart move of an organizer, organizing the organizers is what you did—that's a good way. Thank you so much for inviting us, and for your time and thank you all for your work as well. Yes, Rachel has great tactics. I wonder where you got all of that? Where you learned that? I don't know.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Mariame Kaba is, in fact, one of the people Rachel learned those tactics from through their time organizing together with Survived & Punished NY. Rachel also learned some of these tactics from and is indebted to fellow collective members of the People's Food Co-op, where painful conflict did not always lead to growth, but it did teach Rachel about the politics of working collaboratively. Finally, Rachel would like to thank Mariame for speaking at a law school event and Dean for spending a couple hours of his precious spring break vacation by a river on this long and rich conversation.