

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Artist as Activist

Speaker 1 (00:00:03):

Each day through my window, I watch her as she passes by, I say to myself, your son, lucky guy, this, but it was just my once again, ran away with

Speaker 2 (00:03:35):

Hell

Speaker 3 (00:04:32):

Good afternoon. Today we have a brilliant assembly of artists to discuss the very interesting topic of the artist as activists. My name is AB Spellman and I have the privilege of moderating this discussion by way of introduction. I wanna take a moment to acknowledge one of the great exemplars of the artist activists. The late John O'Neal. John was a field secretarial SNCC when he organized the free Southern theater, the free Southern theater traveled the rural south performing socially relevant plays for audiences that for the most part might have lived their entire lives without ever seeing a play. And then using the after play discussion to show how the themes of the work related to their lives and prodding the audiences to work with the SNCC organizers in voter registration, he continued to make socially relevant theater for the rest of his life. John O'Neill was truly a great artist activist as is our first speaker Emery Douglas Emery was the minister of culture for the black Panther party from 1967 until the early eighties, you know him best as a great graphic artist with a distinct style. His eyes seemed to penetrate to the soul of his subject, his portraits of Huy Newton, a Mary Baracka Stokley Carmichael, and other heroes of the movement are still burned into my memory. More than 50 years later, his work has been shown in museums from San Francisco to New York city from Beirut Lebanon to Brisbane Australia. Thank you for joining us, Douglas honor. Hey, now let's look at a, at a, a video to show the audience what your work looks like.

Speaker 4 (00:06:51):

My name is M Douglas and I consider myself to be a social justice designer, graphic designer. Some of my colleagues who worked in the black Panther, New York chapter, uh, mentioned that they used to sell the paper each week by turning it over on the back cause people wanted to see the illustrations

Speaker 5 (00:08:10):

And that could easily be translated into posters that could be hung up in the streets. In fact, he called, uh, the neighborhoods where he lived to his gallery. So, uh, really felt like it was important that this work really was out in the street and was being read by people in the community.

Speaker 3 (00:08:41):

The work is still strong, still alive. Emery. Yeah. Uh, Emery, I often wonder what brought artists into activism. Was there any like precipitating event or any particular, uh, moment when, uh, you decided that this is what you must do, that your work must speak of these issues and of, of these people?

Speaker 6 (00:09:05):

Uh, when I got into the black arts movement, uh, during the sixties and, uh, at the tight of the, uh, of like in, in city college, when I went to city college of developing my skills and being working, uh, then to, uh, with the collective to change colonial name of the black student unions

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from Negro student unions to BSU and becoming involved in that era, the black conscious era, the black awareness era that I began to develop my work,

Speaker 3 (00:09:34):

Those city college of San Francisco, correct?

Speaker 6 (00:09:36):

Uh, yes. City college of San Francisco. Absolutely. Yes.

Speaker 3 (00:09:40):

Right. And, uh, when did you join the Panther party?

Speaker 6 (00:09:43):

I joined the Panther party about three months after its inception in Jan, late January of 1967. Uh, it started October 25th, 1966, and I got involved then and began to work on this news on the pub newspaper about four or five months thereafter. Uh, but initially one of my first art images that I did was sister Sonya Sanchez asked me to do the yes. To asked me to do the cover of her first porch. She book called homecoming,

Speaker 3 (00:10:13):

Ah, and a beautiful picture. That is, I've seen that.

Speaker 6 (00:10:17):

Oh, thank you. Yes,

Speaker 3 (00:10:18):

Yes. I have that book.

Speaker 6 (00:10:19):

Oh,

Speaker 3 (00:10:20):

Okay. Yeah. Well the Panther party, well, made it a point to integrate itself into the community and made sure that it had activities that were much more than rhetoric to offer the people, but also, uh, were, were, were factors that could affect their lives. Yes. Now, how, how did you conceive your art as being a factor that could affect the lives of the people?

Speaker 6 (00:10:44):

Well, the art was a reflection of the party's philosophical and an ideological perspective, which was about serving the people, uh, body and soul based on our 10 point platform and program about quality of life issues from the art was really a reflection of that in many ways, the feelings and the expressions of the community, the desires, their pain, their love, and their frustrations. And, and out of that, they're self determination to make change about in relationship to the, if the art was all about those issues.

Speaker 3 (00:11:17):

All thank you, Emory. Um, well, we'll come back to you Emery let's, um, move on to our next panelists and that is the F four mission Sonya Sanchez. Um, Sonya Sanchez is a great poet. One of the world's great poets, her poem, singer resistance against oppression of history, of love, of

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self and love of all people in them. The issues of the day become human. We feel the tension of the social evil that surrounds us and the release of his fight against it. We celebrate the manifold beauty of African American people and the magnificent culture that we have built amid the racism that we endure there is fire and music in the lines of this gentle and loving woman. It's good to see you again. This is soya.

Speaker 7 (00:12:07):

Good to see you also, my dear brother. Wow. It's wonderful seeing you, right?

Speaker 3 (00:12:15):

Yes, indeed. Indeed. It is. I don't see you enough. Mm-hmm <affirmative> I'm gonna ask you the same question I asked Emery, what is it that brought you into, um, into the work, into talking to the people through your work?

Speaker 7 (00:12:28):

Well, you know, um, um, I've been a part, um, uh, since the moment my, my grandmother told, uh, my aunties in our house in Birmingham, uh, uh, teach that girl how to read and give her a notebook so she can write <laugh>. So that was, that was four years of age at that time, because I constantly bugged her about reading to me. And also, uh, I was writing, you know, the alphabet, et cetera. And my aunties, uh, did that. Um, I grew up in a place called Birmingham, Alabama, and I remember so much about it and how on many levels, um, uh, we had to live, uh, uh, some of the things that happened to us, but I also remember when my father brought us to a place called New York city. And, you know, we lived in a place called Harlem and Harlem, uh, was a place that, uh, with all black folks, uh, but also was a place where, uh, the garbage people, uh, did not come regularly.

Speaker 7 (00:13:36):

Uh, you know, that, um, the apartment building we lived in did not have heat and you, we could hear the, the rats inside, uh, the walls, whatever cetera, it was a big, big difference from Birmingham and the, and where we lived with my grandmother and the New York city. But what I also loved about New York city was I had a chance to go to libraries, uh, and sit and read, uh, uh, I had a, a chance to meet some teachers who gave me books because they thought that I looked like someone who liked to, to read and write. Um, but I also, uh, was in college when I looked out and, and my eyes via south. And I saw students doing some work and challenging, uh, a country. And we had challenged a country in little ways, but that was major my dear brother, uh, that was something that it made you stop wherever you were, uh, it made, it glued you to the television.

Speaker 7 (00:14:42):

You, it made, you began to ask questions about what were they really doing there in the south. And, you know, all the things that you read for heroes, uh, that my heroes and shees became those brothers and sisters, um, getting on those freedom buses and seeing a bus burned. Right, right. Uh, uh, uh, looking, you know, at people sitting in, uh, walking to work, right, gathering together, laughing with each other, and I didn't need to read Superman anymore. Uh, I already had Superman and superwoman also too, uh, in a place called, uh, Alabama in a place called Mississippi. Uh, and I was glued to the idiot box. That is the television watching them move. And what that meant for me is I've been searching for me. I've been searching for my soul. I've been searching for that blackness that I saw emanating from their bones.

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Speaker 7 (00:15:38):

At some point it led me to Amsterdam avenue and the CP party, you know, it led me to many organizations. And, uh, I ended up with, uh, uh, with New York core. Um, and, and the point was that, but I always had my eyes on those people in the south. I always had my, my, my eyes on them. And I used to say to people, you know, these are, these are fantastic people. These are heroes. These are heroes. These are people who are challenging. You know, people who will kill them, people who will not think about, you know, letting them do what they need to do at I, but lean back on my eyes when I watched them being beaten, uh, in a place, um, wherever it was in the south, you know, and the tears came, but also my poetry began to change. My poetry took a turn because at the same time in a place called New York city, uh, not only did we have y'all, you know, you know, and, and SNCC and, and M L K, right. You know, and all the other people, we all of a sudden got someone by the name of Malcolm in the north. And at that particular point, we began to move and the poetry began to change. The poetry became, yes. I'm sorry.

Speaker 3 (00:16:52):

No, go. No, I, I, um, sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you, but, uh, that's I think we should go to, we'll go to the video now and let proceed some samples of you in your element.

Speaker 7 (00:17:01):

Thank you. Mm-hmm <affirmative>

Speaker 8 (00:17:03):

What to say to you now in the soft afternoon air, as you hold us all in a single death, I say, where is your fire? I say, where is your fire? You got to find it and pass it on. You got to find it and pass it on from you to me, from me to her, from her, to him, from the son to the father, from the brother to the sister, from the daughter to the mother, from the mother to the child, I say, where is your fire? Can you smell it coming out of our past the fire of living, not dying, the fire of loving, not killing the fire of blackness, not gangsta shadows, where is a beautiful fire that gave light to the world. The fire of pyramids, the fire that learned through the holes of slave ships and made us breathe. The fire that made guts into chips, the fire that took rhythms and made jazz the fire of sit-ins and marches that made us jump boundaries and barrier. The fire took street talk and sounds and made. Write his raps. I say, where is your fire? The torch of life full of en and NA Turner and God and dub boys. Andalou Haas, Sojourner, truth and margin, and Malcolm and Mandela.

Speaker 2 (00:18:29):

Sister, brother,

Speaker 8 (00:18:31):

Brother, calm. Come catch your fire. Don't kill. Hold your fire. Don't kill. Learn your fire. Don't kill. Be the fire don't

Speaker 2 (00:18:44):

Kiss, catch, catch, and burn

Speaker 8 (00:18:47):

With eyes that see our soul walking, singing, building, laughing, learning, loving teaching, being, learning, loving building, singing, walking, loving.

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Speaker 2 (00:18:56):

Hey,

Speaker 8 (00:18:56):

Hey, Hey, Hey, young

Speaker 2 (00:18:57):

Brother,

Speaker 8 (00:18:59):

Young

Speaker 2 (00:19:02):

Sister.

Speaker 8 (00:19:03):

Here's

Speaker 2 (00:19:04):

My catch. The fire.

Speaker 8 (00:19:08):

Catch the

Speaker 2 (00:19:10):

Catch. Catch the fire.

Speaker 8 (00:19:13):

What to say to you now in the song

Speaker 3 (00:19:16):

Sanchez, it's hard to believe that the graphic novel has been with us for about 40 years now. The graphic memoir arrives somewhat more recently. Two of the best of them are the graphic books that Andrew island has. Co-produced with the great, uh, John Lewis, the former SNCC secretary, um, hero of the frontline struggle and under singly, progressive Congress, and no pardon and, and UNS swerving progressive, uh, congressional Congress member. Andrew has made John and John's life and work accessible through the generations of young people through these books, entitle March and run. Andrew iden is the co founder of good trouble productions, which creates nonfiction, graphic works and, uh, multimedia projects. He has been a national book award winner, and is an artist in residence at Georgia state university. He was Congressman Lewis's digital director and policy advisor. Thank you. Thanks for being with us, Andrew.

Speaker 9 (00:20:34):

Thank you for having me, man. It's good to be here.

Speaker 3 (00:20:39):

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First, take a look at, at your work then. And, uh, and then we'll have some more words. Yeah. I have those two books, uh, Andrew, and, uh, I've read through them many times. How did you come to produce those with John?

Speaker 9 (00:22:59):

You know, it all started back in the summer of 2008. Um, the, I had been asked to serve on the congressman's reelection campaign as his press secretary. And we were starting to talk about what we were gonna do after. And a lot of, uh, my childhood, uh, was spent reading comics and I loved going to comic book conventions. So everybody said what they were gonna do. They were gonna go to the beach, they were gonna go see their parents. And I said, I was going to Dragoncon in Atlanta. And everybody laughed at me except for the Congressman. And he said, in a deep voice, you know, don't laugh. There was a comic book during the movement and it was deeply influential. And that was the first time I heard of Martin Luther king in the Montgomery story. So I went home that night and I read it and I was like, why is there not a John Lewis comic book? And so I started asking him and asking him, and finally he said, okay, I'll do it. But only if you write it with me and that's where this all started.

Speaker 3 (00:23:45):

Ah, well, that's a great story. Uh, he was a good man, John Lewis, a very, very sweet man and a very strong man at the same time. Yeah. All right. Then, uh, let me introduce our, our last panelist, uh, that would be Jonathan likes. He is a warrior for social justice who wears the arm of, of the black, uh, the arm of the black queer and is the founder of, and executive director of liberation house in Chicago. He also is the director of policy and programs for black youth project slash uh, Jen forward. Jonathan was a founder of the black youth project 100. And through that organization was a producer of the black joy experience and album of freedom songs and chance in Jonathan. There is a wonderful synthesis, a progressive organizer, social policy advocate, and artist. Thank you, Jonathan, for joining us today.

Speaker 10 (00:24:44):

Thank you so much for having me, uh, so honored to be here, standing in you all's legacy.

Speaker 3 (00:24:50):

So, uh, were you, uh, were you an active singer before you got into organizing or were there all simultaneous developments in your soul?

Speaker 10 (00:24:58):

You know, I'm a, I'm a multidisciplinary artist. So, you know, I grew up singing in the church as, as many of the freedom singers from back in the day. Uh, but also, uh, if a guitarist, uh, grew up doing poetry in the movements. So, uh, all of these are critical forms, uh, for struggle.

Speaker 3 (00:25:16):

Ah, indeed, they are indeed, they are, well, we'll talk a great deal more about, uh, those forms and how they affect the struggle today in, in, in the past, uh, let's look at some video, that'll give us an idea of what Jonathan does in his life.

Speaker 10 (00:25:30):

Thank

Speaker 11 (00:25:45):

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I need some healing, my life, someone who care like care, who all the joy, one who believe we can be, can be. So yes. And so, yes. And so yes, yes. I need to listen sense stage that true capacity to pray live on line. Yes. Live. Yes. Yes.

Speaker 3 (00:27:43):

It was very uplifting work that Jonathan, I'm gonna, um, ask this simple question in a rather complicated way. It seems that, uh, we are facing the same issues against almost the same people today that we fought back in the sixties. It's not to say that we don't have victories in the struggle we do, but it is that it seems that the victories are not permanent victories because the opposition, the right, the reactionaries, the neofascist don't quit, they don't quit on any of these issues. They try their best to keep them alive and they resuscitate them. It seems as if they want to reinstitute the old Jim Crow, uh, in the, in, uh, in our new current economic situation, which looks a lot like it did in the 1960s. So the question is, how is the, what is the difference now in the way that the struggle must be fought from the way that it was fought in the 1960s? And how is that taken forward in the art? Let me ask, uh, let me ask one of our younger members, um, Jonathan then since he was the last image we saw on the screen, how do you see it, Jonathan?

Speaker 10 (00:28:58):

Yeah. Uh, I totally agree with you AB that, um, throughout the generations, many of the progress that we have made has been undercut to me, it, it really comes down to, uh, having even more of a ne necessity for cultural workers to be on the front lines of the work that we're doing, cultural workers, but also interdisciplinary cultural workers working together. I think it's time for us to build a new world this world that we are experiencing that has perpetually created systemic and institutional violence on the lives of people on the front lines of marginalization. Um, to me, the people who are best prepared as in, uh, similar to the black arts movement, uh, the Renaissance and the other, uh, movements of, of national and international black and brown artists coming together in solidarity. I think we need that even more now today than ever at the simultaneous times when they're taking art out of our schools, when it's being defunded left and right. Uh, the cultural workers, the cultural producers, those who are cultivating the land of culture in this time are the ones who are gonna, uh, bring progress and bring a new world that's not temporary the permanent.

Speaker 3 (00:30:09):

Right, right. Soory let me ask you, do you recognize yourself and any of the work of the younger artists who are coming out today and who are making this socially relevant work?

Speaker 6 (00:30:19):

Uh, I, uh, well I do, uh, I, I, um, I'm inspired by them. Um, I'm many times I've been asked to, uh, come and, and, and interact and collaborate with them. Uh, many murals of the work that I've done have been done by a lot of young people. Uh, so it's, it's that, it's that continuation of each one, each one and sharing, uh, that historical in a historical context, what, uh, I, I have to offer, uh, and to sharing it with the young people to be, uh, creative in a new way.

Speaker 3 (00:30:55):

Oh, and then away. Oh, indeed. Indeed. Well, um, Sonya poetry has, has, has, has been of the form of, uh, what of, of agitation, uh, communication of, of the struggle of recording of the history of the struggle, uh, since the beginning of poetry, since the days of the five in drum, since the days of the bar, uh, and, and the, do you see a difference in poetry's role and poetry shape

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today in the age of the performance artists? Uh, from the way that it was done in, in the 1960s, uh, when we were more involved in print and just getting to set the foundation for performs art?

Speaker 7 (00:31:41):

Well, I, I don't, I do see some differences. Um, um, I think one of the ones was, uh, when you had, uh, the programs, when people got up on a stage and competed with each other, you know, quite often I was asked to be a judge, uh, for them, and I would, uh, score all of them. Um, um,

Speaker 7 (00:32:03):

I would score all of them in the same way, you know, I would give all A's, A's a, a, a, cause you can't get up and, and compete and say, one of you is a winner, you know, uh, you know, in a poetry contest. Um, my brother, what I know is that these young people are continuation of what was going on in the 1960s, seventies, and eighties. Um, uh, there are some brilliant poets there. Uh, they are writing they're writing in, in such a way that they engage audiences. Um, I think that one of the things we must continue to do, and many of them, uh, do this, is that go out, you know, and do workshops, uh, to help people, uh, write better, uh, you know, to understand what is really going on in the world. That the poem is not just to be up to in a sense to celebrate yourself, but also to talk about what is going on in America, what is going on in, in the world.

Speaker 7 (00:32:58):

And so on that level, uh, I am just utterly amazed, uh, by the sounds, um, that many of our young people are, are saying, uh, I, you, you and I know that, uh, the rappers came out of that whole motion and movement of the black arts. Um, and initially how people in the sense damned them and said how terrible they were. But if you had any great insight, you understood fully that they had come out of that entire movement, you know, of getting up on stages with music and without music talking about what was going on in the schools, what was going on in the Bronx, what was going on in America, what was going on in the service? Um, when raki did that piece about, uh, uh, casualties of war and they were the pictures of the bodies being brought home from the war overseas is amazing.

Speaker 7 (00:33:50):

What happened, that all of a sudden they stopped showing the bodies in the body bags. If you understand, because the power there of the port is still there. Uh, I think on many levels that, uh, what we see with our young people is that we must also say to, to them that make sure your teacher workshop, make sure you go into the schools, make sure you engage, uh, have a workshop on your porch, um, you know, have a workshop in your home, but make sure you that they get all the hears history and history of what they are writing. That they, they are not just the first poet who are poet, you know, on this earth that we go all the way back, you know, to the time that, uh, our people were enslaved in the place called America, you know, and I would read, uh, a poem to them and talk to them about a poet who said, my old master said he was going free me when he died, my old master, uh, you know, uh, ain't died.

Speaker 7 (00:34:46):

And he's 47. My old master said he was on freebee when he died. My old master is 59 and I still ain't free my own master said he was on freebee when he died. My own master is 65 and I still ain't free. I guess I better help. My old master died that was written. And when I would read it to the students say, oh my God, that's new. I said, no, that's old, whatever, you know, and not because we are talking, you know, about in close violence, we are talking about the humor, you

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know, that black humor there, you know, that, that sense of saying simple, Hey, something's gotta be done if I ain't free now, you know, anymore after all the promises. And so what I'm saying simply is that I am amazed and I, and, and in love with the poetry that our young people write, um, you know, I am amazed, uh, I would be amazed more if they come together, you know, and read together, you know, and prop each other up and support each other and make them understand that, you know, this poetry keeps people alive.

Speaker 7 (00:35:47):

This poetry will make sure that we change and look at the world quite differently. This poetry says simply, you know, like, you know, you've got to organize, you know, you got to get out not only in the streets, but you got to get in the streets of your mind, you know, and your tongue and write those words. That, in a sense, when you go into the schools at some point when make a kid look up and say, oh yeah, I do wanna study a little bit more. Oh yeah, I do write, wanna write poetry, or I do wanna, you know, maybe can someone help me do this? And we say, yes, my brother, yes, my sister, we would help you write a poem, you know, um, that would make you live that make us all live that make us smile, that would help build, uh, a new world.

Speaker 3 (00:36:26):

Thank you, Sonya. Yes, mm-hmm. <affirmative> I think, um, it, it is very clear that one of the differences between then the 1960s and today is that there are new media that, uh, we came up in the age of the old cassette machine. You remember that perhaps a moment of silence, uh, they don't know anything about that, but, but the old MI page was the, you were confident your clothes were blue after you produced these things. But this, this was the weapon of, of our day. Today. They have, um, today they have many more, uh, media outlets. And so, but so does the opposition. Now I'm gonna ask you Andrew. Um, and by the way, you guys should feel free to talk to each other and respond to each other. Uh, after this question to Andrew, I'm gonna ask you, uh, how do you see the new media, uh, playing, being used now to, as a tool of organization and a tool of expression of the artists, um, of today?

Speaker 9 (00:37:27):

Well, thanks, AB and, uh, Sonia, that was fantastic. I agree with all of your points. Um, the, the media environment that we see today is, is, is fundamentally still about storytelling. Um, I think in some ways that's why the Congressman had such great success with comics because, um, a comic isn't that much different than a tweet or a Facebook post or a meme. Um, and so as we use these new outlets, we also have to keep in mind that fundamentally, this is, uh, the language of this generation. Um, this is sequential narrative, and that's the same language that, uh, SNCC used in, in 66 in lows county with their own comics. It's the same language that Julian Vaughn used later that year in his Vietnam comics. It's the same language the NAACP used in the late fifties, and that F R used in the late fifties as well.

Speaker 9 (00:38:13):

Um, and these are just being brought online. The vehicle is essentially just, uh, being digitized, but it's the same form of storytelling. And I think, you know, back to your earlier question as well, when we talk about the policy implications, what were, what, what, what my generation's really up against, um, the, the, the movement was so successful that it became so dangerous to the status quo that they, I think we've lost sight of the pernicious policies that they've put in front of us. I think we lose sight. That student loan debt is actually a form of activist control, because if you graduate from college with 50, a hundred thousand dollars in debt, you can't go be

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someone who's the chairman of SNCC making \$10 a week. And it's, it's the same thing with the anti-war movement. They reorganized the way college campuses were designed so that you couldn't take over buildings so that you couldn't have these sit-ins in these protests.

Speaker 9 (00:39:02):

In many ways, they institutionalized on a national scale, the ability to subjugate student activists. And so that's what my generation faces, but at the same time, they also have these opportunities to be able to organize in new ways through social media, through these mediums and these, these, uh, platforms that you're talking about. And I think it still comes down to storytelling. How do we, as a Congressman would've said, dramatize our conflict so that it shocks the conscience and creates a new dynamic with the policies that impact us. Um, and so I think it just comes back down to the same lessons that SNCC, uh, taught us so well, which is how do you tell your story and how do you dramatize that conflict so that every person understands the struggle that you're trying to make them see, John, you wanna pick

Speaker 10 (00:39:45):

Up on that? Yeah, absolutely agree. And reminds me of, uh, the great Cortland, uh, Cox who emphasizes telling stories from the inside out and from the bottom up. Um, but I will say when it comes to social media, I am very hesitant. I'm 31 years old, so I'm a millennial and I, I am extremely, extremely hesitant of, of the presence that social media has in our lives, how it's, uh, eroding democracy, um, how oftentimes we replace social media, uh, with the, the, the importance of feeling each other's energy imp, uh, in person. Now, I love the idea of being able to connect with people, particularly in a time of the pandemic. Yes, the pandemic is still here. It's not over, but, um, I am, am just hesitant what we're doing within B Y P 100 and liberation house to really add on to the importance of what, uh, mama son was just talking about.

Speaker 10 (00:40:43):

We have to bring people together. We have to build communities of support and systems of liberation, where folks are supporting each other and challenging each other's art. So that's exactly what we decided to do. Uh, this year with the black joy experience, we brought together 50 young, black, uh, and trans queer artists and women, uh, to be in Atlanta. And we started creating together poets writers, singers, musicians, playwrights, uh, graphic designers, all together in Atlanta working to build a collective. And we have finalized a scriptural play. We've created a volume, two of the black joy experience album. Um, and, and we are really just trying to make sure that, um, artists are able to come together in intentional ways to, um, to struggle together, not only for the sake of the art, but for the sake of our freedom. Like we don't produce culture outside of understanding that this is a part of our collective liberation.

Speaker 3 (00:41:41):

Right. Uh, I, how does that sound to you?

Speaker 6 (00:41:45):

Well, I sounds amazing. It's, it sounds like solidarity it's like coming together as a family. Uh, at the same time I would wanna speak to, uh, touch on the, uh, digital, uh, comp thing. Uh, so today that's maybe some people on the way they got to connect because of, of, and because we can get anywhere in the world within 24 hours and some people in some places that you may want to connect with in solidarity around the issues of, uh, creativity may be the only way that they can

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get the message is, is, is through that. So it's a tool it's not, it is a tool that you use for that purpose. Absolutely. Yeah.

Speaker 3 (00:42:30):

Well, so you're saying that, but it's also a tool that the opposition, um, seems to do as much damage through as, uh, as, as we do with, uh, having success in it. And I don't, I'll take myself out the

Speaker 10 (00:42:47):

Week's the tool. Yeah. It's the tool. We, we do have to be strategic with the tool we do under understand social media as a tool. Some people think it's the, the, the, all the, the, everything, and that's where I become hesitant. We need to understand it as a tool. Mm-hmm,

Speaker 9 (00:43:01):

<affirmative> what I think we also have to choose which platforms we participate on. I mean, I think it's, it's becoming all too clear that some platforms are just not, uh, they're toxic. You, you have to step away from them. Um, but at the same time, I think we're also just beginning to develop some of the successful tactics that are away from the platforms, right? I mean, like, we're all going back to email lists. It's like having a newsletter back in the sixties, you know, it's the same thing. And all of a sudden you've got billions of dollars being spent on companies like subs stack, who are trying to offer these creative deals to build these newsletter services. And it's, it's interesting to me to watch how the old becomes new in a cycle. What is it history doesn't repeat, but it rhymes and you're seeing it happen all over again. Honestly, I'd love to get an old mimeograph machine to start my own zine again. I think that would be the most fun thing to do.

Speaker 7 (00:43:48):

Yeah. And what we used to do, uh, quite often, when we had a meeting at night, we would be outside the subways, handing out flyers to people. So therefore they could take it to work, but we would be in the subway putting up posters, also saying, be here, be there, whatever, whatever the message was, and people would stop going into the subways and they would read it. They would look at it. They would take it down also too, and get on the subway with it. But the point is simply there other ways that we can do it too. I mean, I mean, the thing to me about having that other media is that they can cut you off

Speaker 6 (00:44:27):

Mm-hmm

Speaker 7 (00:44:28):

<affirmative> I mean, you know, come on people, I asked the question many years ago, someone said, oh, uh, sister, Sonia, press Sanchez. You know, uh, you know, y'all did, you know, had great people when you had all of these meetings, but we can get a thousand people like that. And I said, yeah, Uhhuh, but if they cut you off, how do you communicate? And my assignment was communicate with somebody without that little sucker. Cause we did. Yeah, yeah, we did. And we got a thousand and the question is, how did we do it? And how will you do it also too? Cause Americans not stupid. It understands exactly how we use it, you know, and how we, and how it uses us also too. And at the same time, this is not an anti thing at any point, but the point is, yes, you could do that. But at the same time, go and discover how you could also get a thousand people out one day without the use of that too. It is possible. It was done before and ask some of

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those elders how it was done at some particular point. It'd be very interesting, uh, what they give you, you know? And so

Speaker 10 (00:45:30):

That's so powerful.

Speaker 7 (00:45:31):

Yeah. You gotta do it, you know, because this country will not give you something without taking it away. Yeah. I I've been at the place I've been in my, I was in my father's house once and the TV went boom. And he was, oh my God, the TV's off. What are we gonna do? I said, well, we could talk, you know, you know, or, you know, or we could listen to music, you, whatever, you know, or we can go on the balcony, you know, and watch the planes go over to LaGuardia. I was being facetious. But the point is that it Dawn me all of a sudden. And then I remember going home, calling people. Do you know when, when brother, when brother Malcolm was assassinated, ah, uh, when brother Martin was assassinated, now we were at San Francisco state. Right. You know, and I came home and I picked up the telephone to call and we didn't have service for three days.

Speaker 7 (00:46:21):

Huh. They cut service. And so the question became at our next meeting, how do, how do we communicate if they cut off the, the wire service, the telephone? Yeah. That was a viable question. And people came up with answers. That there's a way, if you, if you cannot get me, you know, for an hour, two hours, this is how we communicate. I am not gonna say on this thing here, but it'd be an interesting talk for all of us to come together and talk about how we communicate. Again, this is real business. People give you stuff to take it away. People give you stuff to listen to it. But, uh, you know, and it's good use of it. It's good. We can get a thousand people to come out to a rally, but at the same time, you know, think about how can you get a thousand people the way other people have done, you know, in other countries to come out without the use of that period, because that thing uses us so very much, does it not.

Speaker 10 (00:47:13):

It goes back to the ma the master's tools will never be able to dismantle the master's house. We were at some occupations last summer and our phones would start acting weird while we're at the occupations. And we knew that the government, as we were resisting and demanding to defund the police by a billion dollars in New York, they were tapping many of our phones back then. Um, but there were so many,

Speaker 7 (00:47:35):

Maybe don't say maybe, maybe you not say maybe, right. <laugh>

Speaker 10 (00:47:41):

So, so many of those same issues you're you're referring to are, are, are issues today. So not only do we need our own platforms to communicate, but we need to go back exactly what you said and, and ask the SNCC elders and the other elders for movements. How did you all organize the March on Washington with millions of people without social media, like told us some critical tools that we need in our time. There was a cool moment last summer, where we were going around and painting the streets, defund the police. So, as, as you're referencing this moment outside of the subway stations, there was a lot of beautiful moments last summer, where, uh, we

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were painting and graffitiing our message around the different cities across the country. And that was a beautiful moment of artists and activism, uh, collided.

Speaker 7 (00:48:25):

And also the artists would go and they would paint on the sidewalks, leading up to the, the bus stop, whatever, and people would stop and look, you know, um, I mean the, the amazing thing that things that can happen, that I'm not saying that we retreat, you know, into, into old history, but the point is that look at it and take from it. What is good and begin to use it again, because I can guarantee you, I can guarantee you really guarantee you that this thing that we are doing now will be diminished at some point, when people, when fast, you know, rolls this head a little bit harder, you will not have what you have to get a rally together, you know, period. Right. Make a mistake about it, you know?

Speaker 3 (00:49:06):

Yeah. Now we have just a few minutes before we get to the Q and a, uh, but I do wanna make a point that, uh, one thing that the artists of our generation, uh, and the artists of your generation share is that, uh, the need to organize as artists and activists, uh, was as prominent as a need to create. Uh, so, uh, you got the artists, starting organizations, uh, the black artists movement. I, I started the black arts center in Atlanta. Um, uh, every, I, I won't go into all the examples, but the theaters galleries, um,

Speaker 7 (00:49:44):

Workshops

Speaker 3 (00:49:44):

Mm-hmm, <affirmative> workshops all, all over the country, started appearing at every city. Okay. Now, uh, I, I, the same imperative must exist today. We not think Albert and Jonathan mm-hmm <affirmative>

Speaker 10 (00:49:56):

Sure, absolutely

Speaker 3 (00:49:57):

Go, Andrew. Yeah,

Speaker 9 (00:49:59):

No, I, I, a hundred percent agree with you. I think what we're happening happening right now is that these spaces are being limited, that they're trying to shut them down in, in many ways. And, and that's, that's part of the, the why a lot of these conversations are moving online a earlier point. The part that drives me crazy, we look at alternative methods for organizing. This is why the postal service is being dismantled. That's, that's our backup, and they're taking that out too. Um, and so I think it has to be that's in, in some ways that is my biggest fear. It is, is if not just, they're trying to control what we say and do, but who we are able to say and do them with. Um, and the pandemic has shown us that the government has tremendous powers to, to use them in the interest of public safety. But what happens when we have a bad actor in control of those powers, and that's what scares me.

Speaker 10 (00:50:45):

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I mean, we have to be able to build our own infrastructure. We have to be able to build our own infrastructure. So when we were at the occupation last summer, we built our own internet at the occupation that belonged to us. So, so we have to get really creative in, uh, developing the means of communication on our own terms with the black joint experience artist collective, we launched the American artist collective this year, but later this year, we're, uh, next month we'll be in Sierra Leone in Ghana because these have to be international infrastructures and international artists movements where we're connecting with black and queer and trans artists and, and black and brown women all around the world. So that's what we're trying to do with the black joy experience. And, and we're excited to take on the issues of this time.

Speaker 3 (00:51:28):

Well, as you build them, I would suggest that you give serious thought to, uh, to how you're gonna support them. Because one of the things that we did learn is that people got addicted to funding from sources that were not, uh, and not inherently committed to your cause. So we have a lot of gestures being made by, by funders, by foundations, by businesses, by corporations now, and funding certain things. But you get fed on that. And then once the day comes, when the funding is no longer there and your work collapses in the ducts, we've seen that very, very painfully over the last several years. Uh, we're gonna gotta go to, uh, Q and a from the audience now, uh, let us see if there are any questions that are, um, available for us to answer. All right. So if people will, uh, if the audience will type their message into the, into the, what I hear you go question for Emory, what was the significance of material, culture parentheses such as buttons, posters, flyers, and signs to the black Panther party and the civil rights movement more broadly? What was the significance of, of, of the material culture of made things?

Speaker 6 (00:52:48):

Well, that was a part of the, uh, PR, but it's also part of the culture of the times as well. It's it? It is something that you, you became a part of the, of the wherever you are, you became the PR for whatever that you were, uh, supporting or part of in, in that respect.

Speaker 10 (00:53:06):

Yeah. And we, we learned from you on that, on that one, uh, Emery, because if you look at the black draw experience, artist collected and our jackets and our pins BYP, just look at the, we wear our politics. We learn that not only from SNCC, but from the black Panther. So thank you.

Speaker 9 (00:53:25):

And it's, it's taking over in, in, uh, the comic space it's gone from, like, if you look, even when John Lewis, when we accepted the national book award, John Lewis was wearing a button that we made with our own printer that said March on it. Right. And then, you know, this big, fancy thing, we got our tuxedos, then we got our little handmade buttons. And at the same time, these, the, the, the kids, my age, they're also using stickers. I've never seen so many stickers be in demand. Right. And it's just, they're, they're just taking everything you did and just putting it in a, in a new light. And I think, you know, the influence, uh, has only begun to be documented.

Speaker 3 (00:54:01):

Okay. Um,

Speaker 9 (00:54:06):

Andrew,

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Speaker 3 (00:54:06):

Oh, yeah. Here's a question about Andrew working with Marvel. Do you see that question, Andrew?

Speaker 9 (00:54:10):

Yeah. Um, I was very fortunate in when Marvel approached me, they wanted a, a story about, uh, cap. They wanted Avenger in the captain Amer in the civil rights movement. And my very first response was I do not wanna write a white savior narrative and they let me go in a totally different direction. This is his story about captain America failing. Um, and it is him trying to essentially punch racism and realizing that you, that's not how you're gonna fix things. He's into my Mississippi freedom summer. And he's got, and, and the, the underlying lesson is that he's gotta listen to the local people. Right. And I think that is all too often a lesson that gets left out of superhero comic, but I think Marvel's been doing a good job. You know, they've got tonasi Coates on black Panther and there's some other things, um, like that, particularly in the publishing space. And I remember writing the last line of that, that story, where, where, you know, captain America reflects, and he says, I was created to fight America's enemies, but how do I fight America? And being able to put that in cannon in captain America's, uh, story I think is, is hugely symbolic in acknowledging the,

Speaker 3 (00:55:22):

Um,

Speaker 9 (00:55:24):

The ways in which the sixties, captain America glossed over our politics and only really began to acknowledge it in the seventies and onwards, sort of with the Nixon era when he becomes nomad and things like that. But comics are such a reflection of who we are as a people, because they are our myths. Um, and so I was just glad to be able to contribute that, that piece to the captain America myth.

Speaker 3 (00:55:45):

I'm gonna brag very briefly. My son Malcolm is the creator of the Falcon and the winner snowman, uh, and, uh, that's awesome. And I think, I think he went as far as Marvel would allow him and, and making certain infusing the shows with, uh, with social social issues. Um, AB you gotta introduce me, uh, sure. I'll do that. I'll do that. I'll do that. He used my, uh, my, my younger daughter who's, uh, causes immigration, uh, and, and she's, um, an open borders person she's been fighting for that. So he used her as the, um, sort of affirmative, uh, super Villa in the show. It was really kind of fun to watch. All right. Uh, Sonya, uh, we have a question here about who are your poet heroes?

Speaker 7 (00:56:33):

Oh, whoa. That's a good question. Uh, not just poet heroes, but, um, gosh, I, someone just asked me that, uh, the other day, and for some reason I, I had missed some of the people, you know, so I went back and, and wrote down actually, um, you know, some of the, the ones, but I mean, people like, uh, Paul Robson, Chebe Margaret Walker, P Neruda, sweet honey. And the rock Nicholas Gallen Ory, Lord Tony Morrison, Fannie Louma, Angela Davis, Chuck D raki, Malcolm, M L K GU Jordan, Alice Walker, Haki boutique, um, Emory all ABC, goodness, get dramatic. Come on, wait,

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Speaker 3 (00:57:24):

Emily

Speaker 7 (00:57:25):

And AB Spellman. I had to get dramatic on that one. I mean, those are the people, you know, uh, the, that, that, and I, and you know, when I do my, when I do my talks, you know, I do that litany of names, you know, um, and, and they are many, uh, but I think at some particular point, uh, and answer to the question, those are some of the people that when I do write, I will probably pick up one of the things they've done or I might even listen, uh, to, I can, because I listen to rake every morning when I get up. I mean, brother, Rod's bad, bad dude. Okay. You know, and you should listen to him every morning because you know, you go and you say, Uhha, you know, after I, you know, after I, you know, do my meditation, but, uh, his is a meditation to go out into the world and say, Uhhuh, when someone says something to you. Right. Um, and, and, and that's the joy of that. Yeah. So those are some of the people, um, you know, that I know mm-hmm, <affirmative>.

Speaker 3 (00:58:22):

That, that, that's one of the great things about, uh, made work poems or prints or, you know, videos or records is that, uh, not only do they stimulate and take the moment forward, but they're there as references. They're there to go back to, and to inspire new moments years later.

Speaker 7 (00:58:42):

But, but in a workshop, everything is not made. If you know what I'm saying. And I mean, you know, sometimes I sit on my porch when I work and these little children come and I have roses in front of my house and they start picking the roses and Lama, oh, don't pick Ms. Sanchez roses. I know they're there for them. But at some point, you know, one of them asked me once, you know, you write poetry. And I said, yes, okay, can you make up a poem? You know,

Speaker 3 (00:59:08):

Of

Speaker 7 (00:59:08):

Course. And I made up a poem on the porch, right. If you understand truly what I'm saying, and the little kid just looked, and I said, back at her, can you make up a poem? And I made her make up a poem cuz she responded to what I responded to. And so always always to teaching, if you understand what I'm saying, when you're asked to do something, give it back, you know, make sure that child also, if it's just three lines and she sat there and her mother said, oh, I didn't know, she wrote poetry. I said, we all write poetry. You know what I'm saying? At some particular point. Right.

Speaker 3 (00:59:39):

All right. Jonathan, last question is, um, who are your musical influences?

Speaker 10 (00:59:45):

Yes. Great question. I have many musical influences when I think of, uh, many of those who came before me as far as freedom singers and developing freedom and liberation music. I think of folks like Nina Simone of course, sweet honey in the rock, but also some of the creators of R and B going back to Lauren keel. Um, going back to Erica Badu. I love me some John legend, but I also have to lift up some of the, um, freedom song and freedom music and liberation music

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creators of my generation. So, um, the dream defenders just came out with a beautiful album called the free tape. Please check that out. Shout out to, uh, revival resistance choir out of New York that just came out with an album called this joy. Uh, Nivas DIA who used to be, uh, with sweet honey and now is creating, uh, freedom music as singles. Um, so I truly believe that freedom and liberation music needs to be a genre unto its own. We need to keep developing it. We need to be, uh, pushing music that is dedicated to our liberation, to our joy and to our freedom. And finally, I'm, I'm inspired by the black joy experience, artists collective. So many of the comrades that I'm able to create with and build with are some of the most brilliant musicians and artists, uh, that I've ever interacted with in my life. So shout out to all the freedom artists out there.

Speaker 6 (01:01:06):

All right.

Speaker 3 (01:01:07):

Okay. Let's um, we'll take that as your closing statement. Can we get closing statements from the rest of you please? Very briefly, Andrew.

Speaker 6 (01:01:33):

Oh, can you hear us? Can you hear me okay? I can't hear. Okay. Well, I, I would, I would, uh, just, um, uh, like to acknowledge the, uh, the amazing conference SN anniversary conference, it's legendary SNCC anniversary conference and I'm honored to have been invited to make a small contribution to it and to be inspired and to be inspired by it. Thank you very much.

Speaker 7 (01:02:15):

Hi. Oh, no one said my name. Am I? Oh, okay. Let me just read this. As sister BICE Reagan said civil rights exposed the structure of America, the manner in which it works it's organized, set up does not sustain itself without oppressing someone in spite of jobs, opening up riding on city buses and cabs. You saw the economically in America. It continues to be a society country that has maintained itself on the exploitation of groups of people. And that's important that we remember that constantly, uh, make the mistake about it. And I think sister Bernie Reagan, you know, for that information,

Speaker 9 (01:03:01):

You know, understanding the civil rights movement is learning a roadmap to redeem the soul of America. Congressman Lewis used to often say that you have to create the climate and the environment for change and art storytelling poetry. These are the vehicles that we need that we use to be able to create that climate. And so I'm just grateful to be able to be with you all, uh, to be able to talk about some comics and be able to talk about some of the work that I was able to do with the Congressman and, and to hear these incredible stories. So thank you everyone.

Speaker 10 (01:03:32):

Uh, I wanna leave you all very quickly with the words of our founding national director at black youth project 100. Um, and I quote, she says black joy comes alive and stays alive through our music. There's no way to think about the black radical tradition without including how our ancestors and we today carry our resistance through sound. So the black joy experience album is the manifestation of our imaginations and our ancestors' dreams. It is raw energy. We must use it to remind us, to build rigor and discipline with joy. When I feel that all else is lost, sounds from

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our people, lift us up. My deepest hope is that the sound of the black joy experience moves and fuels you to join and continue the struggle for our collective liberation. Thank you to SNCC for having me so honored to be here, standing in you all's legacy much love

Speaker 3 (01:04:24):

Good panel. Um, I thank you. Most of all for the work that you do because, uh, even though I'm just being introduced to the work of Andrew and Jonathan, uh, what I have found has been extremely moving and as has, uh, actually stimulated me to do more with my own work, uh, Sonya, um, Emery, I thank you all for being with us today. And, um, we have, uh, many more sessions coming up. I, I encourage the audience to take a good look at the agenda of the conference and, uh, move on to the other sessions, which will also take you forward in your life. Goodbye.