

# SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

## Where Do We Go From Here?

Speaker 1 (00:00:00):

I'd like to do another number for you right now, take him from the same album. It's an idea that I hope we all can share in it. It

Speaker 2 (00:05:06):

Good afternoon. I am jury Al Gusto, a member of the SNCC legacy project board. And I'd like to welcome you to the panel. Where do we go from here? I want to frame our panel with a slight twist to the title. It's going to be a conversation about given how you see here. What is the future? Where and what are some of the concrete paths for getting there. But first, let me take a moment with great pleasure to introduce the panelist whose longer bios may be found on the conference agenda. We have with us, Ashley Henderson, AIAN from Southeast Tennessee and executive director at the Highlander research and education center.

Speaker 2 (00:05:54):

We have Melina Abdula, who is a professor of pan African studies and co-founder of the Los Angeles chapter of black lives matter. And we have Phil Agnew, native Chicagoan and co-founder of the dream defenders as well as of Miami's smoke signals studio conversation. By telling us briefly what here looks like to you, then illuminating for us a path to a future where for black folks, you remember Ella baker said give light and the people who will find a way, some of the kinds of things that you might wanna put into the question, your answer implicitly are maybe technology, maybe demographics, maybe protection of our communities, maybe solidarity with others, but it's up to you. We will want you to answer, as you see fit before, before we start, I want to mention to our audience that if you have questions you'd like to see addressed, please submit them to the Q and a that you should be seeing on screen. We might not be able to address them all today during this session, but we appreciate hearing from you. You can learn more about the work of each of the panelists at the NCC 60th website, where this session will be archived. So I'd like to ask Melina, if you would start us off please, and each one is gonna speak for about 10 minutes, Melina, please.

Speaker 3 (00:07:23):

Sure. Thank you so much for having me and thank you for your work. Thank you for forging a path for so many of us. I'm grateful also to share virtual space with two of my favorite people on this earth. Um, Phil and Ashley, who, I'm sorry, Ashley, we're not in a little hole in the wall bar tonight, but you know, maybe we can have a virtual drink after, right. Um, I think that we are in a really, really exciting time. Um, we are in a time, you know, when we look at the last year and a half, I've talked about this period as a moment when the world is cracked wide open, right? A moment when the spirit of George Floyd and Brianna Taylor and Amad, Aubrey, and also people in our own cities like Dejan, Kazi, and Fred Williams, um, are holding open, have been holding open a portal that enables us to imagine and build, um, from our most radical spaces.

Speaker 3 (00:08:35):

And, you know, I don't watch a lot of TV, but also I don't think it's coincidental that over the last year and a half, my favorite show has become Lovecraft country. Um, and I think often about the, um, kind of parallels between that show, if you're not watching it, um, I don't know that there's gonna be another season, but go back and watch it first season. Right. Um, but Lovecraft country is about this moment in history and it's really, um, kind of, uh, black, I, I don't know, futurist, um, it, it feels like watching an Octavia Butler novel, novel, right. Um, and it's said in

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1955 and Emmett till is murdered and I'm not given away too much. You'll still watch it. Right. Emmett till is murdered. And, um, his friend D who's a little black girl from Chicago, um, is kind of this being that is forced to challenge to engage in the African principle of Sankofa going back and getting it right.

Speaker 3 (00:09:51):

And there's all of these things that happen. But really D is challenged to go back to 1921, Tulsa, Oklahoma, and learn lessons and bring things back for a reimagined future. And in order to make sure D gets what she needs to get. And in order to make sure that, um, we don't lose the moment her mother and her entire community is entrusted to following her into the past, to bring it forward, to bring those lessons forward. I feel like this is also that moment. And in the show, it's her mother hip IDO. Who's holding open the portal to making, to make sure that de returns with these lessons that are necessary to forge a future. And I feel like we are in moments. We are in a moment now where that portal is closing. So the world was cracked wide open May, 2020, the world is opened.

Speaker 3 (00:10:58):

The portal is wide open. And as it's opened, there's all of these things which were challenged around, right. We're challenged around. Do we say we wanna reform systems that are fundamentally oppressive, right? Do we say that, you know, we're going to make the world okay by passing new laws or are we gonna have the bravery to reimagine a future? And I think that most of us stepped into a space that said, we're gonna fundamentally reimagine the world. That's what defund the police was about right. Is about right. Is about that. We have decided to be brave and say, if they're gonna steal the life of our Emmett till then, we're going to make sure that those lives and those spirits are honored in really fundamental ways. And we're gonna say that there are no more systems that spit in the faces. And when you watch the, the show, you'll understand what I'm saying, spit in the faces of our DS who have survived these moments.

Speaker 3 (00:12:03):

We're not going to allow for the theft of our emits or our Georges or our Brianna's life without actually fundamentally changing the world. And so we have been doing that work and now the portal is closing. And so just like Sankofa as Sankofa bird is a bird who's crane had is crane completely backwards to pull forward the lessons of the past, but it's feet are planted firmly forward. Right? So what does our forward look like? I think in, in order to honor Dejan Kazi in order to honor, uh, Brianna Taylor, in order to honor George Floyd in order to honor all of those who we say we are working for in order to say the names of the freedom fighters who walked before us in order to say the name mama, Harriet Tubman, or mama NA uh, um, Baba NA Turner or mama Sojo truth, or Ida B Wells in order to say their names and mean it right in order to be worthy of uttering the name Fannie Lou Hamer, we have to be willing to do the work of abolition.

Speaker 3 (00:13:15):

And abolition means that our feet planted forward say that we are gonna absolutely dismantle the things that we're set up to bring our demise. We are absolutely gonna bring an end to police and prisons and even capitalism. We're gonna bring their end. And when we talk about abolition, abolition means two things. It means destroy, destroy those things that were meant to bring our demise. It means topple. It means topple those things that were meant to put a target on George Floyd's back, right, who should be celebrating his 48th birthday with his daughter, right. It means

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topple those systems, but it also means to build new systems. It means to build systems where I think about other black fathers, like RO Mac, right? I think about other black mothers, like Riddell Jones that had a right to things that Riddell Jones at four foot, 10 inches tall, the mother of Titanian and Sakari shouldn't have been gunned down in a neighborhood in south central Los Angeles, because she was accused of stealing \$80.

Speaker 3 (00:14:32):

If she needed \$80, she should have had \$80, right? When Giom stood in the middle of the Crenshaw Baldwin Hills mall and said, I need help. He should have gotten help in the form of mental health resources, not in the form of LAPD, bounding up the escalator with every gun blazing. And so where we go from here is daring to be abolitionist is daring to say, we don't have to, in the words of Erica Badu, we don't have to believe everything that we think, right, because the world has conditioned us to think a certain way. But abolitionist challenges us to say that we can radically imagine a world, a world where there are no police anywhere. And definitely not in our schools, stealing, stealing the lives of people like Mona Rodriguez, an 18 year old child who had recently given birth to a five month old and is leaving a school fight, which is what all of us did said.

Speaker 3 (00:15:33):

Y'all remember meet me at 3:00 PM after school did what every single high school student did, which is have a fight at 3:00 PM and then go home. She should have been allowed to go home. And then she should have been talked to by her mother and maybe some counselors and given whatever was going, you know, given some resources for whatever going was going on with her. But what should have not happened is that a school police officer gunned this child down as she tried to make it home to her five month old baby, we have a sacred duty to protect Mona Rodriguez's. We have a sacred duty to protect my children. I'm the mother of an 11 year old, a 15 year old and a 17 year old. And they have a right to be at school and be nurtured and play and still talk about anime.

Speaker 3 (00:16:26):

And, you know, <laugh> um, to do the things that school children do. Um, and we absolutely how we get to the future, how we make sure that that portal doesn't close ahead of us is we have to think about who are the bravest and most imaginative among us. And they are our young people. They are our young people. They are people like, you know, I think about Kila Williams who helped us defund school police by 35% in L A U S D. I think about Myam Mara. When we celebrated that 35% defunding got on the mic the very next day and said, yeah, we can celebrate the 35% \$25 million is a lot, but we're not stopping now. We want all of it. We're coming for all of it. And so we have to be willing to be as radical and courageous and imaginative as our children like Amara and Kala and our men and today way and say, we're coming for all of it. We will topple every system systems that keep us unhoused some systems that keep us under resources under resourced. And we will radically imagine a new world that gives our people all of what we want and most of what we

Speaker 2 (00:17:53):

Need. Thank you, Melina. We'll hold that in our minds and go to Phil.

Speaker 4 (00:18:05):

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Hey, good afternoon. Good morning, everyone. Uh, I think we could probably end the panel here. Um, the doc already laid it out and you know, people always say that, but truly, um, what doctor already laid out is, is a lot of what I would say. I'm, I'm happy to be here. Um, I'll echo the previous comments and, and just saying, uh, thank you to everybody that had a hand in corral in me and us, um, to being here. I know it, wasn't an easy job doing that. And, uh, also to the SNCC elders who, um, have consistently been, uh, some feet for me to sit at, uh, kind of some shoulders for me to cry on some guidance for me to look to over the years, people often, very often, far too often make up this story about how the younger folks don't talk to the older folks and why can't we get people in the room?

Speaker 4 (00:19:00):

And I say, every single time, I'm sorry for you, but that hasn't been my experience. It never has been my experience. And so, um, in particular, the SNCC elders and everybody at duke, um, everybody in the, the whole of North Carolina really is a special home for me and a place where I've been able to go for refuge and guidance consistently, um, in my work and in my practice of being a better organizer. So I can't go forward without thanking you all, every single one of you all for, for who you've been, and those that we have lost for who they still are for me, um, in this. And I hope to repay that forward, um, Dr. Meli mail already laid it out, you know, and I, I'm gonna agree fully with the fact that the here and now is a world that has been torn us under, you know, we live under a capitalist empire and in order for the inadequacies, the inhumanity, the insanity of capitalism to flourish, it needs to tell a really, really good story over and over and over and over and over again.

Speaker 4 (00:20:05):

And it needs to be reinforced over and over and over again. And when, in some reality, one of those stories proves true. We need to tell that story over and over and over and over again, even though it's the exception and not the rule. And we actually have existed in a time where every single one of those stories has been blown out of the water, where capitalism, where globalism, where racism, sexism, white supremacy, misogyny, none of it makes sense to anybody anymore. And it makes less sense to those young people that Dr. Mel is talking about than any other generation prior. And so we have a legitimate opportunity before capitalism, before the global empire that we live under, begins to tie it back up in a bow, this new story that it'll have. And, and you know, that new story is that everybody is a brand.

Speaker 4 (00:20:55):

Everybody is a corporation. Everybody can make money if you just get on the internet and you can have all the things that you want. That's the new story now that, that you're no longer a, a slave to the corporation because you are a corporation in and of yourself. Um, and so they're already working on a new story. And before they do that, as Dr. Mel said, we have a legitimate opportunity, right. To tell our own story. And Dr talked about Sankofa, and what I'll do is not, not spend my whole 10 minutes piggybacking on the brilliance. Um, but talk about what I think for where we go from here, um, is that we need to go back once again and return to building organizations. And, uh, it is falling out of Vogue. And obviously you got three people on here, four people on here that know about the beauty and the, and the pain, the gift, and the curse of helping to start an organization and shepherding an organization.

Speaker 4 (00:21:53):

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But there has been no other proven method of revolutionary radical change, but through the vehicle of organization, individuals though, no matter how popular, um, no matter how many followers, no matter how charismatic and attractive, handsome, or beautiful have never been the vehicle for the social transformation that is required in this moment, before that story gets retold. And we have another 20 years of the neoliberal nightmare that we've been living under. And so what I would say, what I want to impart into this conversation is that from SNCC, from black Panther elders, from my, my peers, what I've learned consistently is the importance of building organization. People are questioning almost everything right now. Identities are being ed, um, in every corner of the world, right? Uh, politics are being re-articulated. This is an exciting, a fun time to be alive. It is an amazing time to be alive, but if we do not do the slow, arduous, hard thankless work of building, developing and nurturing member based organizations, not just organizations in and of itself, because it has a name or a, a building right, or massive funds, but member based organizations, we are gonna lose all of this excitement.

Speaker 4 (00:23:21):

And in this moment, our opposition is incredibly organized, rank and file all the way up. They fall in line. They fall in love, they move and they're aligned. And so if we think that we a ragtag group of dreamers, right. Of believers of people with God on our side, are gonna be able to, to withstand this organized machine. I, I hate to say that we are wrong. And so what does it take really to build an organization? I think there are a lot of great books and texts and movies and things to study. I'm just gonna offer some of the things from my personal experience in helping to build organizations one. Um, I think that if we don't take the time, um, to develop organizations with a foundation of love, um, then we are gonna lose love and spirit. Then we are gonna lose. So there are a lot of organizations that are built around anger and rage, and those are incredibly palatable and galvanizing and istic emotions.

Speaker 4 (00:24:24):

But if our organizations are not built around love and community, not things that you should roll your eyes at. And, oh, we, we love but genuine love and community. Our organizations are gonna die. The masses already know how bad the world is. They already know how much destruction surrounds them, how low their pay is, how high their rent is, how high their blood pressure is. But if you don't have an organization that people love and want to be around, right, then we are gonna lose. And so I, when I, when I'm thinking about what makes a great organization, I'm thinking about, we need organizations filled with love and filled with spirit, Ashley, how do we have a movement where people don't sing anymore, right. Where, where, where people are not dancing anymore. And so those are the things that we need in this moment when you're building organizations, um, you need organizations with focused goals.

Speaker 4 (00:25:19):

We need organizations with focused goals right now, right. VO goals, intent on building up power and member based power right now. Um, and, and, and so when you got, when you gather these things together, that love that community, that focus on power, you've got a good bedrock for organizations. And I think, I think truthfully, and I'll, I'll really, I'll bring it to a close cause I really want to hear from Ashley. Um, if we don't right now, uh, in this re-articulation moment that doc is, is talking about, and we're gonna talk about people are actually looking to belong to something. Um, and people are looking for, uh, places of not just togetherness, but where they

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can, um, seek and to find truth. Uh, we're working with black men build the organization that I helped start last year with a bunch of other brothers and sisters, right?

Speaker 4 (00:26:10):

With the goal of organizing and transforming black men to be in service of all black people. We're not a boys club, right. We're trying to just bring, bring brothers together to do what they need to do and get right. Um, is that brothers and, and, and all of our people want a place where they can go and what they're seeing on the internet and reading on the internet, they can go and talk about and, and get some truth. Because right now what's happening is when people question everything, people question truths right. Long hail truths. And that is a beautiful thing because you're tr many people are questioning the orthodoxy of this thing that we've been living in, but it doesn't mean that nothing is true, right? And so we have to reassert that our way of being is a truthful way of being is an honest way of being.

Speaker 4 (00:26:57):

And so people are looking for organizations that's that also represent truth. And so, um, as we look forward, where do we go from here? My proposition, my proposal is that we go back again, the church still exists because it is an organization filled with spirit filled with love and their own version of the truth, but they got music and they've got all other things. And I think if our movement is gonna capture this opportunity, keep that portal open, make sure that other people can get through, create space for imagination, create space for those moonshot ideas. We need to return to building organizations, make that the thing that we do make that the coolest thing that you can be a part of, more than just sharing more than just the marching. All of those things are incredibly important and potent, but until we build the infrastructure that can outlast us, we're gonna kind of continue to be in this. So that's where I think we go and I'm, I'm really happy to pass it to, uh, Dr. Ashley Henderson.

Speaker 5 (00:27:53):

<laugh> I love it. I love it

Speaker 2 (00:27:59):

To the audience. Please. If you have questions, you can go ahead and start to put the questions into the Q and a at the bottom of your screen. Ashley, take it forward.

Speaker 5 (00:28:10):

Perfect. Um, thank you so much, Jerry. And I mean, I'd be remiss not to gush a little bit about what it means to be in this virtual sacred space, uh, with people who not only do I like, but I, I, I really do love, um, this is a bit of a, of a family reunion. I feel moved just to see your faces, um, and then to be even more specific, you know, Highlander and SNCC have a 60 year long love affair. Um, and so though I have not experienced all 60 of those years as, as a 36 year old. Uh, I definitely have been the inheritor of the, the beauty of that, of that dynamic kinship. Um, and so I bring greetings to SNCC legacy from, from your family, uh, on the hill. And I mean, I think this question not only is timely, I think it's, it's, it's literally critical.

Speaker 5 (00:29:06):

Um, and I am by no means an expert on everything that happens in the whole of the United States or across the black diaspora. But what I do know is the south. And so I'm gonna use us as an example of what I know for certain about where we are. <laugh> what is the here? Uh, what

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the, what is the here is COVID 19. I live in a state where the percentage of black C's COVID death is higher than the percentage of the black population of the state climate change is here. Right? Uh, you know, we are impact we've been in a year of never like literally nonstop manmade climate disaster, whether it was the winter super storm in the winter, uh, snow and ice, like we had never seen in this region into tornado season, into hurricane season, which is still not over. And then as soon as it is, we'll be right back in the winter super storms, right.

Speaker 5 (00:30:03):

Where we are is capitalism. Right. I live in a region where the highest concentration of low wage work is ironically also where the highest concentration of black people and L G B T Q plus people live insurrection <laugh> is here. We are an insurrection at times, right? Milar is here, right. White nationalism and paramilitary forces are here. Right. And I know that, that I could keep going for days. Right. There's no question. Many of you even watching probably are like, I know, man, that's the reason why all the liberals need to move to the south. Right. But actually before you come to save the endangered black hillbillies, let me tell you the other side of what is also true about what is here. Mutual aid was born here. It's still here, solidarity economies. It's funny always to hear people talk about Fannie Lou Hamer, uh, because everything that she built, whether it was fighting for racial justice was SNCC, uh, black liberation, very specifically, whether it was building social solidarity economies, right?

Speaker 5 (00:31:11):

She believed in cooperatives, uh, whether it was food justice and land stewardship over ownership, that that stuff was stuff that she already did, whether it was talking about governance and government through the Mississippi freedom democratic party, right? Those things still exist in the south. We are not a place without infrastructure and lesson, community defense still here, abolition born here. The first abolitionist newspaper was written in east Tennessee. A place that would've seceded from the Confederacy had our state seceded from the union reparations are here. Not only in terms of the tools, we need to be able to fight for it, but very literally campaigns that are successfully winning reparations. And the fight for electoral justice is just as alive as the never ending onslaught of the white rights attempts to suppress our ability to do so. Right. I could go on, but the, the, the point to me about going down the bad list and the good list is that very little of this.

Speaker 5 (00:32:17):

I, I mean, my hope is that very little of this can be ignored, particularly in the context of last year and this year moving into next year, considering what the south has already told you about itself and its ability to prove to you that so goes as goes to south. So goes the nation. Isn't an opinion. It's a fact, right? And there's no way you could possibly be in love with SNCC so much so that you would spend your weekend in this 60th anniversary conference and celebration. Uh, if you didn't know that the largest social movement in us history that showed itself powerful last year was only a manifestation of the 21st century blossom of, of 20th century SNCC seeds. <laugh> right. And I'm not saying that SNCC was the only, before all my core and, you know, black Panther party family gets mad at me.

Speaker 5 (00:33:10):

I'm not saying they were the only, I am saying that they were one in a great cloud of witnesses that built the infrastructure by which the movement for black lives could be a 21st century. COFO right. This is not new work to us. This is in fact, our inheritance, these people have been

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singing victory is ours to us since we were in the womb. That's where we are, is the inheritors of a great legacy of work through SNCC, where we are, is understanding that to build the beloved community and the house that it will be living in will require lots of tools, lots of containers, lots of configurations, multiple tactics, right? We are beyond the 20 20th century beast between policy and organizing and direct action and recognizing that we need all three. And, and we need some on top of that, right? That by any means necessary means by all the means.

Speaker 5 (00:34:06):

And it might not mean that I do it all, but it will mean that I might need to work in solidarity with folks who do the things that I don't know how to do or don't want to right. Then now is the time that we have to be building beyond individual interventions. And that's not new to us. Either. SNCC taught us that even this weekend, you've heard from people that are in, uh, you know, voting rights work. You've heard from electeds. You've heard from the freedom singers, using culture as a way to do political education and to get us hyped up and ready for a continued fight, right? You've heard from clergy, you've heard from, you know, saints and a, you've heard from folks that are building community through member based, organizing. You've heard from capacity builders and political and popular educators. It's taking all of that to build the kind of movement that we can not only win with, but sustain the wins with what we have to do in this moment where we are right now, I feel is relearning how to be human and doing that together.

Speaker 5 (00:35:07):

How are we human as individuals and trying to have a human experience with other folks? How are we telling future stories, right? How are we building a narrative of what will be that includes us, right? Where we don't just have a narrative about how we were really good fighters, but we were really good winners, right? And I, and I feel like if we can, if we can be intentional about learning those lessons in this moment, if we could be disciplined and rigorous and study and theory development and practice and information, and self-determination by all the means. But recognizing that collectivity is what will get us that self-determination and defended. If we do those things, then our ability to live into a future story, a 50, 8,000 year strategy that we are behind in building comrades that we might fool around and actually realize that we deserve the power that we've built, that our people have given to us, that people sacrificed their lives and livelihoods for.

Speaker 5 (00:36:09):

And if we do it by studying SNCC, we can realize that not only is the south a critical aspect of how we build a liberated United States, but quite frankly, that the United States is a blip and the kind of international black solidarity movement building that we need to be doing. Right. SNCC. Wasn't just some folks that were doing work state side, they were building relationships with black people, literally all over the world. And that's what makes us powerful. That is actually our inheritance is that we aren't starting the attempt to build this 50, 60, 7000 year strategy from scratch. We have folks like Julia Gusto. We have folks like Jennifer Lawson. We have folks like Judy Richardson. We've got folks like Cortland Cox and Charlie Cobb and all of the greats. We've got ancestors like Sam block and Bob Moses, right. With folks like that. I feel hopeful about this, this next question that drew that, I'm sure you're gonna ask us about, well, okay. If that's where we are, where, where are we going?

Speaker 2 (00:37:08):



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You've done it. You've answered all three of you have done both the here and the where, and we can take, uh, we've got good time for questions if we have any from the audience. But it, in the meantime I've been listening, you should see my page. It's full of notes. This is like of the best too. Some of the best stuff that I've heard in past months. And so, you know, co gently and also how can I call it passionately expressed? And I think people need passion too, about, you know, about a struggle like this. You gotta have passion. Otherwise, you, you can't, you can't keep going. But from my notes, I wanted to see if I could get you to reprise each of you and say some more about two things that I think a lot about. And I think a lot of other people think a lot about as an older person, even though I've been forced to learn how to work on work with on zoom.

Speaker 2 (00:38:05):

And it was at a meeting probably not quite 10 years ago, but a long time ago where a number of people this is before black lives matter movement, but younger people that we were meeting with in North Carolina, I think we were in Durham, in a hotel, locked in for a week with each other. And this question was alive then. And, and it's the younger activist who pushed us. That was the night that all of us got Twitter accounts. Corland got one, I got one, you know, people had to point our fingers. And finally, somebody would just say, well, just gimme the phone and I'll set you up. Just gimme the answers. Uh, I'll set you up, but there's a long running discussion in the black community and other places, but particularly among activists and organizers, younger and older about technology. So I'm one of those people, that's a technophobe and a techno file.

Speaker 2 (00:38:59):

I love all the new technologies that are available. Uh, 79% of them, I can't use and have to find a younger person, but I'm, uh, what can we call it? Perceptive enough to know that this is, is around. They're gonna, there's gonna be more, it's gonna play a larger and larger role in our lives. So as the kinds of organizers that the three of you are, could you just delve a little bit more into the, the Janus faced, and this is not even the Sankofa bird, but the two double edged sword of technology and the uses and abuses and opportunities and challenges of technology for, for us, for this struggle that you all have laid out.

Speaker 6 (00:39:48):

<affirmative>

Speaker 2 (00:39:50):

Any one of you or all three.

Speaker 3 (00:39:54):

Well, I'll, I'll just say this, that technology is a wonderful tool. It's wonderful that as I'm also writing down notes, I'm like, let me tweet what Phil just said. It's wonderful to be able to do that. Right. It's wonderful to be able to put a call out and say, we are meeting on Wednesday at four o'clock and we really are meeting on Wednesday at four o'clock in front of the LA police protective league. And we're gonna say that police associations are organized crime. They are not unions, right. And thousands of people will see it in hundreds will show up. It's a wonderful tool. And what happens when Instagram and Facebook go out, cuz they did. Right? One of the things that we have to remember is that it's a tool like a bulletin board is a tool, right? A phone is a tool. It is not the movement.

Speaker 3 (00:40:52):

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And you can't replace the spirit that comes with this field, talked about, you know, sitting at feet, you can't replace that spirit with being in on Instagram. You know, that doesn't do it. So technology is useful. We don't own the technology. We don't run the technology. We can't stop the technology from shutting down and we don't wanna lose the power of spirit and connection by over relying on technology. And so I think the relationships can be enhanced through technology. We're doing it now. We're able to talk with each other now because of technology and the meat of what we're saying and teaching and absorbing and experiencing has to come through something that's beyond technology. It can't be technologically only our relationships can't be mediated through technology. Hm.

Speaker 4 (00:41:53):

Yeah. True enough. Uh, to add to that WhatsApp, you know what, they're all owned by the same people. And so, um, when WhatsApp went down, you know, we lost even that connection. We, oh, we don't have social media, we can text and, and, and to some degree we couldn't do that. Um, so to add to that, I think one fully agreed. It's a supplement to what we do. It's a microphone, but a microphone is nothing without the, the voice. And so I think we've gotten into a place in the last few years where we were placed where we think, you know, social media is the end and not the means. And, and so what doctors is laying out is, is, is right on. Um, and I also think one of the dangers I'll add to the litany of dangers of technology, um, are the, the heavy surveillance, you know, there, there, um, everything is not meant for the public discourse.

Speaker 4 (00:42:46):

And I think we've, we've gotten far too comfortable, uh, naming exactly where we'll be. Um, and at what time we'll be there, um, we've gotten far too comfortable, airing our inner quarrels with, uh, comrades or colleagues or people that we don't know on, on social media. Uh, we've gotten way too, um, comfortable, airing out our own inner insecurities. And I I'm, I'm somebody who does that, but you know, these are, these are, are, are forums that are consistently watched by our opposition and the algorithms that they use, um, to, to curate your timeline are very intentional, not just for you to buy. I think the, the, uh, consumerist part of it has been laid out in a number of studies, but also to monitor how you feel and what will be your, your reaction to certain things on any given day. And I think we've gotta be very cognizant of that.

Speaker 4 (00:43:46):

And I, you know, the last thing I'll say on the, on the negatives is, you know, there was a time and I, I, I know I've talked about this often, but there just was a time. I remember when Rodney king happened and Rodney king is seared onto my memory to this day that, you know, I was seven years old. I saw it and I, I never thought I would see anything that brutal ever again. And now you see a Rodney king, every five minutes. And the impact of that on the psyche has been numbed. And the, the rough parts of that have been smoothed over to the point where, um, empathy and, and, and, and just the, the natural emotions that come upon you when you see someone be hurt or die has begun the atrophy in young people. And in, in, in many of us, you know, we couldn't, I couldn't, if we, if we knew in 1992 that we would see a Rodney king every five minutes, um, that, you know, that would be appalling us, you know, that would be a dystopian future for anybody at that time. Um, and we're living in it. And so I think without real people in the real world that provide young people that provide our people with a very human, um, counterpoint of foil, or even an affirmation to their engagement that they're having online,

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um, we're gonna be lost. And so we've got to use it as, as doctor said, as a tool, um, and not the, not the end all be all.

Speaker 5 (00:45:18):

Yeah. I, Amy, I think I re I literally remember jewelry having a debate on stage at the SNCC, uh, digital gateway opening about this very question. Yeah. Um, it was me and cleave sellers going toe to toe about the, or not of, of, of technology and what I reminded my comrade cleave <laugh> was that technology by denotation, right by its actual, you know, white man given definition is just knowledge put into practical use to solve problems or invent useful tools. That's, that's literally what technology is. So what that means is that technology existed when SNCC was born. Technology was used by SNCC to talk to hundreds of thousands of people before the internet, but guess what? They used like newsletters and mimeographs they used the press, right? They used letters there. Those were still technologies. Right. And just like with social media, guess what those letters were intercepted and read by the state. There were white supremacists that were, were monitoring the technologies that SNCC use. It's not new stuff. Y'all SNCC would not have it. Would've been hilarious to sit in so many conference spaces and, and hear Ella baker telling, you know, telling Bob Moses and Ann Cleve and, and Diane Nash and John Lewis and all these folks. It, would've been hilarious to hear her say, you know, y'all just sending out those newsletters that, that ain't organizing

Speaker 4 (00:47:02):

<laugh>

Speaker 5 (00:47:03):

Cause that's essentially the conversation we have in this 21st century context about the tool of social media as one form of technology. Right. Right. So I, I just, I feel like it's important to say that because people make it seem like it's a brand new convo and really it's not technology has existed for as long as humans have. I think the important pieces that I would pluck is, is some of what my comrades already said, right. Melina and Phil both mentioned that we do not own these platforms and not only do we not own the platforms, y'all when we give our shit to them for free, they own that too. Right. So for all of the brilliant stuff that we're writing on Facebook and Twitter for all of the dynamic, sometimes problematic, but usually generative the pace that we might be having on Twitter for all of the beautiful pictures of blackness that we put on Instagram for all of the conversations that are not archived somewhere and papers that we can control.

Speaker 5 (00:47:58):

And we can use as lessons for the next generation of organizers, activists, freedom, fight, and folks on what's sad if, but if all of that disappeared, not only would we be in trouble because we don't own it, not only would we be in trouble because the state and white supremacists and others use it to surveil us folks that don't have the, the same, you know, we desire to bend the moral arc of the universe towards justice. But like also we literally have given away literal a way literally decades worth of, of our brilliance to a platform that is really not meant to be useful for us, that we've just figured out how to make useful for us. Y'all might remember Facebook was like a party app for college kids to hook up.

Speaker 5 (00:48:40):

Right. Anyway. So I just, I just think we, we need to be intentional about knowing how to use the tool, right. And knowing where we should, we should take our stuff back. Um, and I, and I think

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to be real, it's like we could talk all day about the surveillance and, and, and, and the ways that social media and technology are used against us and I'm here for that. But I actually think the much scarier thing is how easily we let it get us all sorts of turned around, right. Not everything that I tweet or put on Facebook. It might sound good. I might let me speak about me cuz Melina and Phil don't do this. I might put something that sounds good because I'm mad on Facebook and then 5,000 people then say, it's it sound theory when it's not, it was a temper tantrum, right.

Speaker 5 (00:49:31):

Just cause it sounds good. Online does not make it fact does not make it sound theory. And I fear that far too often, we're allowing YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, to inform our strategies and not actually like study and theory and practice in summation. Um, and that is a dangerous, dangerous game to be playing when lives are on the line. Uh, the last thing that I'll say, and then I'll be, I'll be quiet. <laugh> is that right? <laugh> cause it it's just, it blows my mind. I can't tell you how many times I've heard somebody use a slogan that they found on the internet and be like, yeah, like this is, this is informing our strategy. And I'm like, but it's just a soundbite. Yeah. It actually has no to it. There is no practice in summation to prove that this is actually scientifically going to win us our, so we've gotta be more diligent than that.

Speaker 5 (00:50:23):

Um, and, and I've seen even worse. I've seen the right, knowing that we, uh, are not doing our, our due diligence to, to create sound strategies and tactical interventions use social media and, and, and, and targeted articles to have us ripping each other apart because we didn't take the five minutes to see where did this information come from, who seated? Right. Um, that's where I, I fear I fear the usage of the, of those tools. But regardless of that, I remember that there is a long legacy of, of using technologies, uh, by, I think the world's greatest teacher, SEPTA MC Clark, who taught hundreds of thousands of, of black working class people, not even just black, right, but a, a multiracial working class before the internet. And before cell phones through these citizenship schools that literally supported movement building across the largest geographic region in the United States.

Speaker 5 (00:51:22):

And if Ms. Clark was innovative enough to be able to build something like that beyond the technologies of the 21st century, then imagine what would do stewardship. We might be able to do if we were intentionally inclusive of those of those tools. And, and I, I think that, that gives us an opportunity. You know, Phil talked to you about how organizations are a vehicle for social transformation that you don't get social transformation without organizations, right? Technology are just other kinds of tools and we need to be intentional about what are they for? Let me make it clearer. If I wanted to build a house, or if I wanted to fix a car, I wouldn't want a toolbox that only had hammers in it. Right. Right. And the toolbox that I used to fix my car, wouldn't be the same toolbox that I used to build my house.

Speaker 5 (00:52:16):

And that the toolbox that I used to build my house, wouldn't be the same toolbox that I would use to fix my car. Right. So what do we, as movement, hopefully, movement scientists who are trying to movement alchemists that are trying to build a social movement, powerful enough to change all of the world's material conditions for the better, what would we need to study to be intentional about making sure we're using the right tools to build the thing that we're trying to

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build. Right. And, and, and I fear, I fear that we don't spend enough time doing that. We just throw tactical spaghetti at the wall and hope that something sticks

Speaker 3 (00:52:48):

On that note. Can I go ahead? Yeah. Can I just add just one, one thing to Ashley's brilliance, please, please. Is the other thing is you want the mechanic working on the car and the carpenter working on the house,

Speaker 5 (00:53:04):

Reach Molena.

Speaker 3 (00:53:05):

So if somebody rolls up and they are not a mechanic and they got the wrong set of tools, but something you like, they outfit you, like you say, that's a fly mechanics jumpsuit though. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, don't let them dictate the plan to fix the car. That's right. Right. So when we talk about technology, the other thing that technologies new technologies is Ashley is reminding us, um, one of the things that I think is more dangerous with new technologies than old technologies is it allows people to have a reach that they might not necessarily need to have. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. So if somebody has been a brilliant comic book writer,

Speaker 4 (00:53:52):

Huh?

Speaker 3 (00:53:54):

What makes you trust them to fix the car? Mm-hmm <affirmative> right. What makes you trust them to say, this is how we gonna move as we struggle to end qualified immunity, right. I'm not saying everybody shouldn't have a voice, but just as we used old technologies, right. We were, we would take there's people whose leaflets we take and peoples who, whose leaflets we throw in the trash, and we can't take everybody's leaflet, even if they have a blue check behind their name. And so I think it's really important to remember that as we think about new technologies, because Phil also, I think raised at stakes is high. You know, mm-hmm, <affirmative> that you have folks who might even be well intentioned, um, or might not be whose credibility hasn't been as, um, we haven't been as diligent in researching their credibility as we need to, if we're going to allow them to work on our car or our house, or dictate a plan moving forward.

Speaker 2 (00:55:10):

All right. On, on, on that note that has continued like thread about intentionality and some of the things that we do need to do, including use technologies to help us do that. We have a question which, uh, doesn't seem to be addressed to any particular person. So each of you could comment, in fact, let me see. We have probably three or four. Oh, we've got a lot. So let's see how many we can get through question number one. And I'm sorry, I can't see who sent them because they're being put up by the, by the tech team to see how do we counteract the self hatred and anti-human narratives that lead to internal violence, misogyny, patriarchy, and homophobia. As we move forward to a, to toward a multicultural, multiracial economic democracy, anyone

Speaker 4 (00:56:08):

I'll jump in, not as an expert, but as somebody who's struggling through this now with our organization with black men build, as I stated, the goal of the organization is to organize and to

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transform black men. And so, uh, black men are not the only, and are not the chief purveyors of misogyny, but, you know, top five. And so the goal is to ensure that we have a space for black men to come, uh, to examine the ways in which, uh, uh, misogyny, patriarchy, uh, the, the Western masculinity that we grew up under have affected our ability to be full human beings. Um, first with ourselves, um, to, to, to be able to navigate our inner worlds in a way that allows us to, to process with ourselves, to love ourselves, to see ourselves as human beings and worthy of full humanity and love and connection with other people to be able to receive and to give love, to be able to live lives of honesty, um, without shame and guilt.

Speaker 4 (00:57:15):

And so, uh, for us, it is building, uh, an organization that has that as its center. And, uh, we start there and, um, and then we put those things into practice we're in year one. And so, um, we are at the beginning, you know, stages of this social experiment we're trying to run. So I don't have a whole bunch of empirical data about how effective we, we are gonna be at this. But I think the only way that you do it is through, um, you know, what we've seen through reading through the circle and through accountability, um, with our organization. And we have a value statement that, you know, it doesn't say, Hey, I don't want to be a misogynist, patriarchal homophobic man, but it does say that I'm a critical thinker. I'm bonded with black women that, um, I want to transform and evolve.

Speaker 4 (00:58:10):

And at that baseline level, we've gotten 2000 or so brothers to sign it. And that's good enough for me right now as a starting point, right. To say, all right, you signed up to say, you want to evolve. You wanna transform to meet this moment that the old ways of being a man are insufficient for you. So let's start from there. Um, now I know obviously all of these are not just about men. Um, you know, we are all steeped in all of these things, no matter what identity, but that's the experience that I'm having right now. So that's my stab at answering it through the context of working with black men, bill.

Speaker 5 (00:58:43):

Yeah. I mean, I think Phil is being humble. Uh, you know, black men bill got my baby brother to come to a mass meeting before any of my organizing did. Um, very literally. So I think, I think you'd be a humble comrade, um, and shout out to black men build I'm I'm biased, but I love them. Thank you. Um, you know, I mean, I think to Phil's point it's like we build, we build movements. Like we build social clubs, right. And the, and I don't, and I say that as a per, you heard me earlier using all the lefty jargon about discipline and rigor. I believe in that shit to my bones. <laugh> I believe you need to be trained up underneath somebody that, that, that individuals are not annoyed at dental leadership. The communities choose them all of that. But I also believe that that the, the, the lesson of, of 2020 in particular was that when we get to a particular scale purity politics and perfectionism will be the enemy of the good mm-hmm <affirmative> right.

Speaker 5 (00:59:37):

Um, that we need. And I mean, again, I think there's so many lessons from SNCC about this, right? It was like, they could have said all of the organizing that's happening in the sixties needs to be led and centered by us. And maybe some people in SNCC said that, right. But they also were like, all these people, one aren't gonna join SNCC and shouldn't, and two, they shouldn't all join SNCC. Right? Mm-hmm <affirmative>, mm-hmm, <affirmative> NAACP should, is gonna

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do what NAACP does. Core Congress of racial LA is gonna do what core does. Right. All this they're gonna do what they do. What we need to know is what everybody's doing. Right. And figure out how the puzzle pieces fit. And so they build a council of federated organizations, right. Mm-hmm <affirmative> and very similarly, again, I think we've, we've talked about the tools, but like the very containers then that hold people, that shift conditions, right?

Speaker 5 (01:00:27):

If you're building mutual aid networks, you might not need the kind of organization that's building membership power, right. If you're doing direct service, you might not need a policy shop. If you're doing policy work, you might not need, you know, uh, uh, all these other pieces of, of containers that, that keep people together. And that's fine. But if we're setting the bar that to, to enter our movements, you have to be, uh, someone that is an abolitionist is a as a black queer feminist, uh, loves queers and, and trans and gender nonconforming and intersects people at the jump. We might leave a whole lot of people out and then guess what happens? And the absence of us making spaces that help folks see they belong first and shift their politics and values. Second, then what we find is that we concede the territory and other formations, like the white rate, fill them, right.

Speaker 5 (01:01:23):

It's why black men voted for Trump in the double digits, both elections it's because they didn't necessarily see that they could be a part of our movements and be where they were. And so what SNCC has taught me is that you meet people where they're at, you gotta be in somebody's community, doing that. You meet people where you're, where they're at, but it doesn't mean you leave them where you found them. Right. But all too often, we expect to, to meet the, we want them to meet us where we are at <laugh> with our values we're at, with our value statements and mission statements being like shoved down their throats, uh, without being clear that we've been out of accountable and right relationship with communities like that for a really long time, as, as a, as a organized left, let me speak as a leftist.

Speaker 5 (01:02:03):

Um, and I think we've conceded territory. And then we go back into these neighborhoods, expecting people to just like, be down with us because we're Marx as feminist or something. That's not how organizing works. It's just not how organizing works. So I think, you know, what I would say is that, that we need to be intentional about recognizing that to build the kind of beloved community that we want is a, it's literally a practice and that all of us, even the most woke, mess it up every day, that as a cisgendered person, I am undoing transphobia every day. It's I have to do it. I have to be accountable to it. I have to build a crew around me to hold me accountable to it so that I don't create harm against other folks. That abolition is a practice, right? That feminism is a practice.

Speaker 5 (01:02:44):

It's not just a value statement. It's not just a theory in my brain that I agree with. It's something that I actively am either doing or not doing every second of the day. Right? So what are we doing to, to literally build these communities of practice, these containers for practice, where it's lower stakes, so that when we get into high stakes conversations and in high stakes moments where by life is a queer black Southern woman from the working class, literally depends on field, not being a patriarch, that when we, when it matters, we've practiced enough that he knows how to not be a patriarch, right? To me, that's, that's the, that's the only way we get to actually living our

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values to scale is creating these other communities of practice where we can try that out. I think black men build is one example of that. I think the movement for black lives is one example of that. I think Highlander has been a place where people get to practice that, uh, for almost 90 years now. And I think there's for every one of those examples, there's hundreds and hundreds and hundreds more.

Speaker 2 (01:03:43):

We have, I wanna make sure that we get to just at least this one other question, and I'm gonna ask Melina to lead off on the, uh, on the answer, because we really have about two more minutes on being told before I'll ask each of you to make a summation statement. So this one other question, Melina, and you'll see why I am directing it first and above all to you, amen. To all of you, the questioner says your brilliance and radical thinking and organizing. Is it possible that educators can establish an organization within a university with the objectives like Phil suggested, or would that just be keeping the oppressive structure alive?

Speaker 3 (01:04:28):

I think we have to move wherever we can. And so, as an educator, um, there's a reason that I'm in Panafrican African studies, that ethnic studies is the only set of disciplines that comes from community, not from a so-called ivory tower that we tie ourselves to community to black liberation. Black studies is tied to black liberation. So it's imperative that we, um, advance ethnic studies. People didn't understand why black lives matter. One of our, the first pieces of legislation that we ever endorsed was an ethnic studies requirement in California. But when we think about the black power movement, the black power movement birthed ethnic studies and ethnic studies continues to be tied to black liberation struggle. So yes, we can use those spaces. And in K through 12 education, we need to think about people like Cecil Lee, Myer, Cruz who's a member of black lives matter Los Angeles, and is also the president of United teachers, Los Angeles.

Speaker 3 (01:05:33):

What she was able to do with, um, educators all across the country and birthing black lives matter at schools, right? Making sure that what we do in the schools is, you know, as long as we have these structures, we have to both work towards their end, right? If there's structures that we know are oppressive, we have to work towards their end, but until their end, we have to make sure that we make them as free as possible. It's a black power concept that my Baba Baba, Hank Jones, who was a member of SNCC, as well as a member of the black Panther party talks about as survival pending revolution and our children are in these school systems. And so we have to educate educators, make as much liberatory space within them, even as we're working to build new liberatory models about education outside of them.

Speaker 2 (01:06:29):

Thank you, Melina. I'm afraid that that's all, all we have time for this afternoon and I'll tell you we got two or three really good additional questions here. I hope that the, uh, the chat can be saved. I have a feeling we'll be able to return. At least some of us, we, we meet fairly regularly, you know, even COVID despite, and we can come back to some of the questions, but we're not going to get them. I want to thank the people who put the questions up. And what I'd like for us to do in this final two or three minutes is for each of you to give us a closing comment, a really, really pithy, short closing comment, perhaps there's one thing you'd like us to pay attention to above all else in the coming 10 years in the next decade, what should we be paying attention to?



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Speaker 5 (01:07:20):

I think there's so much re this is so hard. I think

Speaker 2 (01:07:24):

Be brief.

Speaker 5 (01:07:25):

I think, I think this is a moment of collective acceleration. And so my, my biggest recommendation would be to not sell ourselves short. Like we actually could win a lot over the next decade. Um, if we make the demands that we deserve and not just what we would concede to. Uh, so my encouragement would be for, you know, black folks, white folks, other folks of color alike to really fight for what we deserve to win, which is to me, abolition, which to me is anti-capitalist is something better where people are put over profit, where we demand what our communities have always been requesting and building outside of a codependent relationship with the state. Um, and so I, I hope that we go big over the next 10 years that we make some risks that we're innovative, um, and that we do it together with a multi strategy across our issue areas and sectors and geographies. Uh, I think if we do what we might fool around and win,

Speaker 2 (01:08:23):

All right, Melina,

Speaker 3 (01:08:26):

I think that we need to all question our place in this movement moment. So I agree completely with what Ashley is saying and what is your role in accelerating things? So join an organization as Phil is saying, you know, you can't do it as an individual. We need to all be organized, join an organization, and then wake up every morning and think about one thing you're gonna do for black freedom and do it. And it can be a 62nd thing. It can be your whole day, but do something every single day. You have to exercise that liberation muscle every single day. And we will have this accelerated and expansive, um, win victories that are just coming and coming and coming. So 10 years from now, we're amazed at what we've accomplished.

Speaker 2 (01:09:18):

Okay. And Phil,

Speaker 4 (01:09:20):

I I'm just agreeing and loving this. I, the only thing I would add and, um, people who know me as a ludite will probably be like, what, but I, I, I would say, uh, technology is gonna offer us, um, a, a world of opportunities. I think, um, the ability for us to, to, um, move in, move in the world with different economies, different, um, uh, um, sorry, different currencies. It's something that we should at least be interested in. Um, not, not, will not be a panacea, but in addition to all that say joining an organization, thinking and dreaming big, I think the technological realm is one that can afford us an opportunities. And I don't think we can have a conversation without talking about internationalism. And so I would say over the next 10 years with technology, with our organizations, with dreaming bigs, we big, we should figure out, um, really what is gonna be our tactical and strategic alliances across the world across waters. Um, because the opportunities there are rife and Africa as always is there is ready more than anywhere. Um, and, and the opportunities there are bound.

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Speaker 2 (01:10:31):

All right, I'd like to ask everyone to please join me in thanking our wonderfully thoughtful, wonderfully intentional, wonderfully dreaming and doing panelists as we end this session, but not our struggle good night.