

AMP SEEDS

Episode Transcript

Reimagining Safety

September 9, 2021 5pm

Brenda Hernandez: Hello. My name is Brenda Hernandez. I am the AMP Seeds Events Manager. I am so excited to welcome you to the Allied Media Projects AMP Seeds Fall Series and today's event Reimagining Safety. We're so grateful to share this virtual space with you and our guests Tawana Petty and Myrtle Thompson Curtis. Cat Brooks had a family emergency and will not be able to join us today. Please send your positive energy to Cat and her family. This event will have ASL interpretation and live captioning. Please be sure to turn on your captions using the CC button within your little Youtube screen. We encourage you to share your questions with our guests, share some love with friends and say hi to any old friends in the chat. Please welcome Tawana Petty and Myrtle Thompson Curtis.

Tawana Petty: Thank you so much, Brenda. I was just getting ready to say I am so deeply grateful to be in conversation with you today about *Reimagining Safety*. And of course this is a conversation amongst friends. This is actually a conversation that we find ourselves in quite frequently as lifelong Detroiters. A city that has suffered under a pretty half century long propaganda assault with regard to the humanity of Black residents and a lot of stigma comes with being in a predominantly Black city, especially with regards to conversations on safety and what mechanisms need to be in place to create safety for our community. So we find ourselves in constant conversation about whether we need more policing or more surveillance or different types of technologies in order to create the types of neighborhoods that would make us feel whole and safe. And so you've been doing a lot of work the entire time I've known you, I think I've known you now close to 13 years maybe, and the entire time I've known you you've been reimagining what it means to be human. We come from the legacy of Grace Lee Boggs and James Boggs. And not only do you serve on the board there but you also co-run Freedom Farm, which is probably the first space that I dug my hands into the earth. And I might have screamed when I ran across some little bugs and things. [laughter] You helped me to feel safe in that moment, right? So when we're thinking about safety, it has so many connotations and implications for how we exist in



the world. And so we're afraid of a lot of things, whether it be through upbringing, you know. I'm afraid of spiders because everybody in my house was afraid of spiders and maybe if the people in my home were afraid of spiders then maybe I wouldn't be afraid of spiders. So in Detroit, you know, I grew up feeling like this wasn't a safe place to be because that's what I was told. That's what the media told me. That's what I read. And that's how I internalized my city. And so we're in the activist social justice bubble and we talk about this sometimes...sometimes we believe that our views on safety are the views of everyone. Or should be the views of everyone. And so I want to talk to you a little bit about what it means to be so rooted in a community that you're consistently having this dual dialogue, right? This dialogue with social justice folks who are saying abolition and no prisons and no we don't need any more policing, which this is our view, right? We view our society as a whole society being one that doesn't require a lot of policing and mass surveillance and things like that. But you also talk to everyday people on the ground who believe we need *more* policing and we need surveillance to feel safe. So how do you navigate that conflation within your work? And tell us a little bit more about like what you do in order to create an environment where community members can feel safe, at least in your slice of Detroit.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: Thank you, Tawana. And that was a wonderful way to get started. But first, I want to just say I am now a member of the James and Grace Lee Boggs Council. So that hard work of being a board member is on someone else's shoulders. I just get to have wonderful conversations, political conversations with others on the James and Grace Lee Boggs Council. And you also talked about feeling safe and I remember as a child how safe I felt being watched by my neighbors. Over safe..... [laughter] They were always there. The neighbors, the mamas, the aunts, the grandpas, they were always there watching and the older folks. So it gave me a sense of if something was to go down, there's somebody right there. Somebody's going to catch it. We felt good about that. We resented it as children because we couldn't get away with mischief, only a certain amount. But having that conversation or creating that space, that dual conversation because I am in a community where at one point it was folks might use the word "blighted." I don't particularly want to choose that word, but with the closing of schools, where there's disinvestment in the human infrastructure....and that trickle of what those things create. You have poverty, you have disinvestment in education, you have lack of jobs, you have lack of transportation, public transportation that's...that doesn't cost an arm and a leg where folks can freely move. And the scenarios that come from that, the intergenerational gaps where young folks are convinced that....and they should feel that the world is opening up for them but instead they find doors closed, but older people are still in that mindset where you have to go out and do this, this, and this. But this, this, this is not there, those jobs, that education, those opportunities is not attainable. So along with just having those few



barriers which creates a desperation and a lack of opportunity amongst people. And so folks would say crime is out of control, we need more police. Having been a person who has been on both sides of that, of feeling opportunities should be there, they aren't...I'm angry, I'm upset, what do I do, how do I channel that, but also understanding every interaction I've had with police left me with anger and apprehension. The outcome for me wasn't positive. The outlook for most of those folks in those dire situations there's not positive. So I'm able to create a space and have empathy on both sides, even though it's very difficult. And not to go in and prejudge and say I'm alright because I don't have all the answers. And so just opening up with others to be able to just ask the question, what would safety look like? What does it mean? How does it feel? And to just be non judgmental. And sometimes that's very tough because I don't believe bringing a militarized police force into our communities is the answer. I don't believe it will make us more safe. But I can't convince an elder whose home has been robbed by one of the young folks who has found a lack of opportunity, I can't convince her of that. We can only have a conversation. And so I'm of the mindset that creating communities where we have opportunities, where we don't create returning citizens, transforms that whole conversation.

Tawana Petty: So would you say...I mean you mention you're on the James and Grace Lee Boggs Council now, right?

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: Uh huh.

Tawana Petty: That comes from Grace Lee Boggs and James Boggs, and Grace would tell us sometimes the questions are more important than the answers. And would you say that this is one of those instances where the questions are more important than the answers? I'm thinking about the elder that you're talking about, right, who is feeling vulnerable and feeling unsafe and a young person who's clearly feeling unsafe as well, not being wrapped around with services. Not having access to the quality of life resources, right? So we know quality of life issues that are not addressed can lead to quality of life crime. So that dialogue that you're having with that young person who has committed this, you know, injustice against an elder and that elder who is feeling that this injustice has happened to them, sometimes they're not given an opportunity to ask deeper questions about... this is one of the things that I've learned and the resistance against mass surveillance and militarized policing and those sorts of things within Detroit and other places is that the dialogue is not happening enough, especially intergenerationally. So what types of questions do you think that people should be asking when they're starting to think about ways to create a safer community?

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: I think some of those questions are how has disinvestment in



the city and your neighborhood, your community affected you... always to go to the perspective of looking at what someone else is facing. I mean, as far as when did bringing the police into a situation make you feel safer? What crimes or what criminality are we really talking about? And do you have anybody in your family that has been affected by the injustice system? I'm sorry, the justice system. And, you know, what was the outcome? So every case is not just there is no just blanket to put over it. And that's for me, that's so important. As we move forward in the reimagining and asking folks to just dig a little deeper, not just so much on a material loss but the loss of our humanity as we deal with one another, can we just have a really honest conversation. Just a really honest conversation. Can we take the anger out just for a second? Just long enough to have a conversation. A meeting of the hearts and minds. And it's real gentle. What are the times in your life where you felt safe? What were the components? What were the components? And what kind of a world would you want to what kind of world do you want to live in? Do you want opportunities for our children- that doesn't mean this or that? There is no in between when it comes to our law enforcement system. They have a job to do and that is their job. And what is our role in in our communities? And often ask what is your role? Are you active? My thing is collective and personal responsibility and accountability to each other and the communities that we live in.

Tawana Petty: I'm glad that you mentioned the job, right? Of law enforcement. It's a job. It's a job. And people get that mixed up, right? You know, when Black Lives Matter became a movement, then, you know, as Grace has said the counter revolution responded with Blue Lives Matter. There isn't a blue life. And having a conversation about policing and safety and reimagining safety, how do we humanize one another again? How do we think beyond those uniforms? Because in Detroit, as you know, a lot of, maybe not now, because circumstances have changed but growing up a lot of officers were our neighbors. They lived in your neighborhood. They grew up, went to high school with you, and that has been one of the challenges as well, is that you have communities like ours where the people, they don't live in the city, they didn't grow up in the high school and go to school with you, they don't know your children. They come in to their job with no connection to the community and go back to their neighborhoods. And so the inhumanity is now everywhere. It's within the institution and now out in the community because folks are looking at these roles and they're serving this role with these rules within that role and a lot of unjust quote, unquote crimes and quality of life issues are not a part of that. Thinking about the full human is not a part of that. And so in having a dialogue, I know within my work I find myself going to police headquarters and having dialogues about why do we have drones in our communities. Why are you building another prison? What happened with that police brutality case? What's the policy on this? Challenging the board of police



commissioner. And often there are folks in those uniforms who will come up to me and tell me they didn't even know that this technology was in the community. Or they didn't know what face recognition was. Or they didn't know what a surveillance drone was. And then I get a human. Now, this isn't all the time. I'm not here to humanize law enforcement, right? I'm not here to humanize the institution. I would like to work every officer out of a job, to be clear. I would like to create a society where we do not hire people- people are not being paid to capture, track, and incarcerate. The reality is now that we live in a society where these people in these uniforms exist among us. So while these people in these uniforms exist among us, what then is the conversation that needs to be had? I'll give one more anecdote before I come back to you, Myrtle. I was talking to a friend of mine who's a historian and he teaches with Black History 101 Mobile Museum. And he has over 7,000 artifacts from history all the way to pre-slavery to now. And he was invited to do a talk with the FBI and he said I don't know how to feel about the FBI reaching out to me. I didn't even realize I was on their radar. But then he decided to go. And one thing he learned while he was in that conversation with these federal agents was that they had no history on the counterintelligence program, they had no history on like what the origins of the FBI or the Bureau of Investigation were. They didn't even know the interactions of surveillance with Dr. Martin Luther King or the Black Panther Party. These are people who are have sworn an oath to this institution and are out here lifting up and adhering to the policies and processes of this institution and being quite violent in our communities with no historical analysis of how the institution came to be or the harms that the institution has caused on the community. Particularly Black communities. So these people have pride in these institutions and these jobs. And that is something that we don't talk about. And, you know, quite often i'm afraid to have that dialogue within like social justice movements quite often because we are in a bit of a bubble, right? We're in a bubble where we're having a particular dialogue. We want to abolish police, we want all of these institutions out of our community. And I am that person. That's what I want. I wanted to work all these people out of a job. I don't want to live in a society with policing and prisons. However, if we don't have the conversation about the reality that we live in, it becomes very difficult to systemically undo unjust systems. And so we had a conversation, you and I, a bit earlier about...I'll let you tell it. You went to a home going ceremony this morning.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: Yes, a celebration of life, a home going ceremony for a young lady who was a relative, my husband's younger cousin. 32 years old. And she was gunned down, drive by shooting style, a week or so ago.

Tawana Petty: I'm sorry.



Myrtle Thompson Curtis: And sitting there and I'm thinking about this work that I do, you know, the abolition work, having those beliefs that, you know, it all needs to be gone. We need a whole different way of we need a transformation. But i'm looking at the pain of the children, the nieces, the nephews, the daughters, the family members and how they must feel at this time. Where's the justice? Where's the recompense? How could this happen? The anger that was in the room by the best friends. Who gets held responsible? Why aren't they whatever justice they see fit, locked up, whatever. How do we keep ourselves safe? How do you have that conversation? Or transform those view that we don't have enough police, that we aren't watched enough? And so all those questions that you asked in the beginning, or those conversations that you have in those rooms with law enforcement or, you know, those are the very same questions because folks don't have enough information. We're conditioned and we're given the this is how it is, this is how it works. We don't understand the hypersurveillance and how it's a tool against us. We're pitted against one another. And that's what I feel the most with the lack of education about what safety, community safety, collective accountability, that's how I feel. That's what's going on. We're pitted against one another. Because in actuality prison does not equal justice. It does not equal...we're any safer. Calling the police to a situation has often resulted in escalation of what's happening. A lot of times they're called to a situation they don't even have training, they shouldn't even be on.

Tawana Petty: Right.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: And so having those conversations in the community to enlighten folks and just to take a small survey of the times you have called for help when the police is not really what you wanted when you asked for help.

Tawana Petty: Right.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: And so just to have those type of conversations. And then to hear where we just want to feel safe. We don't...you know, we're tired of the shootings, we're tired of the this and that. The police aren't going to help in that area.

Tawana Petty: Right.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: So how do we start creating those things on the ground, in our schools, that can transform our communities, one community at a time. I mean...going deep. Not going wide so fast but really going deep. It is serious work and these are serious questions. And those jobs, those police jobs, or those law enforcement jobs, the first thing... you know, and that's another aspect of the



conversations that I have with folks. Well, what about their jobs? Those jobs can be transformed as well.

Tawana Petty: That's right.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: Into something that is more meaningful, more impactful on a community level, on a humane level. Because the work that is...the work that the resources that are needed are not being met by police officers. And so if we just take our time and the education or just, you know, really sharing the knowledge and that's, you know, part of what I do. People come away from these conversations with oh, I didn't know what hypersurveillance really was. Oh, I didn't know what that Ring doorbell thingy was all about. Oh, I didn't know there were other numbers that I could call besides 911.

Tawana Petty: Uh huh.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: You know, when really that is not... those folks are overworked for real. They're asked to do things they're not even equipped to do. And to come in our neighborhoods and sometimes that stereotype of what they coming for in an urban neighborhood that has suffered from disinvestment, those attitudes and that stereotype is there and the hostility is there on both sides. So there's a lot of work to be done and a lot of conversations to be had, and I'm open for all of it.

Tawana Petty: Yeah. And I know, you know, like I said, it was a risk to dig into the direction that we went in, right? But one thing that I've learned in the organizing I use against face recognition as an example is that repetition, conversation, and political education has the power to transform hearts and minds and get people on your side that wouldn't otherwise be on your side. The first meeting that I went to, I was shouted down by elders and everyone. Get out of here and leave our police alone. [laughter] And every week, every week when with new literature, articles about Green Chairs, Not Green Lights, from you, resources that we co created. Just super like persistent, coming into the space. And I had people coming up to me afterwards going like tell me again, what are you saying that these systems do? You know, and so I went from are they going to get me in the parking lot to these folks really are hungry for knowledge and information about what these harms are. And everybody wants to feel safe. But the conflation between surveillance and safety, militarized policing and safety, public safety being law enforcement and governmental institutions is so embedded into our psyche and into the narrative that unless you are willing to stick and stay, it's going to be surface level. You know, Grace used to always say, the reason why she stayed in the struggle was because she stayed put for so long, you know, and that helped her with



trying to transform, you know, society and the turning to one another that you and I always talk about. And so I want to talk a bit about the work you're doing on the ground. Like I can remember a story you told me once about young people coming to the garden and asking you if pizza was in there. Does pizza grow in the garden? And you know, and you're breaking down like kind of, it actually does. Let me tell you how. [laughter] And so...

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: Well, I wanted to reminisce being in one place so long because I remember as a young girl going to elementary school and there was this singing group and they were police officers.

Tawana Petty: The blue pigs.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: The blue pigs. And we were jamming and rocking out in the gym to that music they were playing. And so they were our friends, they were the good guys, they were a music group. They sounded like the Jackson Five to us. But as we grow, interactions become a little different. Our ideas, my ideas changed.

Tawana Petty: Right, right.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: But what I do in the community, and I'm in the Jefferson Chalmers area, I've been growing a garden, growing a community as part of Freedom Freedom Growers since 2009. And it's been more than I could have ever imagined. And it always takes me back to my grandmother's little small garden in the backyard with the greens, tomatoes, the onions and the spiders. [laughter] I had to be forced to go out there, but I'm so grateful I have those memories. But what we do here is on a larger scale. There are fruit trees and young people and there's a culture hub. Yes, some young people, I'm trying to figure out how to get young people into the garden. I need to get young people into the garden. So every day I'm out there and I see these teenage girls going past and they come back past with some chips or a pop or something like that. So one day, you know, I asked them did they want to come in the garden, you know? Do you grow pizza in the garden? And I'm thinking about the components of pizza and yes. [laughter] I do. You've got to put it together. I can get some dough. And so, you know, just always being creative and thinking outside of what this is. Because it was just a vacant space. There was nothing but tall grass. And my partner Wayne Curtis said, "let's get some seeds and let's do this. Let's create a space. Let's create a safe space. Let's create a space that our neighbors will appreciate to transform what was happening in this community." And this community did have a lot of rambunctious...I'm going to use the word "rambunctious" folk. I mean, oh, yeah. I can say there was a shoot out here. I can say there was a drug house right over there. But



those things began to transform. We had to be strong enough to have that conversation. Young man, you can't have a drug house here. We have kids in the garden all the time. We've got to do something different. Baby, I don't want to call the police on you, I don't. That's the last thing I want. That's what I said. But if one more person knock on my door asking for them thangs, I said, and I had tears my eyes. Because I look at you as you could be my son. Your life has a greater purpose, please. I can't tell you what to do, but I'm asking you, please move. Don't do that here. We don't want that over here. I didn't know what was going to be the outcome, but they left. He said, "thank you, Miss Myrtle. Thank you." That's just one instance. And the young people coming into the space and always looking at ways to be accountable for each other, to each other. Being responsible, this is my role. This is our role. My question when folks come into the garden, "what is your role in the community. What is your role?" That's important.

Tawana Petty: Yes.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: For to be valuable as a human being. That's why it's so important for the children, to have a role when they come here. You know? Tawana, you just asked a great question, but yeah, we've been doing this 13 years and Green Chairs, Not Green Lights is one of our latest initiatives as a collaboration with so many other wonderful folks, you included, and the work that you contributed.

Tawana Petty: Let's talk about what it's in response to.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: There has not been one person I've talked to about Green Chairs, Not Green Lights who hasn't said, I want to hear more. That sounds wonderful. We need more of that. Yes! What is what? Can you come and do a workshop here? I said, i'm one person. There's a group of us. Let me figure something out. But there hasn't been one person who hasn't said, I like that. It's a form of....it's a component of educating our community members, gifting them with a wonderful piece of furniture that they can use, an initiative that they can create on their own and bring in what community... that conversation of what community safety looks like. And every area is different. So it might look different. But it has an overwhelming response.

Tawana Petty: Let's talk a little bit about Project Green Light. So just to back up a little bit. So Project Green Light is a mass surveillance program in Detroit. When it started in 2016, it was eight or nine gas stations were going to be surveilled by police officers with these flashing green lights that were going to stay on the gas station that is stay open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and they were gunna be monitored at real time crime centers and police precincts for what was considered crime. In response to the



fact that that Project Green Light rapidly expanded, it went from the eight or nine gas stations to 256 to over 700 and now we have over 2000 green light cameras at over 700 businesses. The response from community members like yourself was to implement an alternative vision. So I just wanted to give that back story to folks who are listening that may not be familiar with like why we would be talking about Green Chairs, Not Green Lights. A direct community response to what safety actually is, and safety not being mass surveillance. Safety being.... talk about how you've been implementing Green Chairs, Not Green Lights to create the community conversations.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: So it's not just an "I" it's a "we," but we started with just pulling together folks who were doing this work of getting the information who were creating safety zones like the folks from Detroit Safety Team and creating pod maps. And what a pod map is is you have a nucleus and you go out from that to what does safety look like. If you're in a crisis situation, what are the things that you need to feel safe right away? And so you give folks an opportunity with a pencil and paper to create their own pod map. And Curtis Renee is the person who has done that with Green Chairs, Not Green Lights. And it's wonderful to see people sit down and take the time to think, what do I need to feel safe? Who is in that circle? Then who is in that outer circle. And then what is the community resources that can be pulled in. So as folks began to create these pod maps, they start thinking of what safety looks like. It doesn't always mean red and blue lights flashing. It means sometimes being put in a really calm situation, first and foremost, or call my mom or call such and such and those first things, what are you doing the first 15 minutes of a crisis. That's what we are with those pod maps. And then, of course, the information that folks don't know... where they buy into all of the hyper surveillance and technology. Making bills for themselves or whatever. And they understand what are the ramifications of that piece. And then as well as the economic piece that could come along with Green Chair, Not Green Lights. We're training young people to make furniture. And we're local. Be seen not watched green chairs. And we have carpenters who have taken the time away from carpentry to create benches out of palettes. I mean, it's collaborative work. We got a really cool design from friends of ours in Chicago, the Sweetwater Foundation and they sent us these designs and we've created these designs. It takes three or four pallets, some nails, some brackets, some hammers, a saw, and if you want to get fancy some paint. And you know, we work with young folks on how to create these benches. Then we present them. For having a workshop, you get to take this bench. At Avalon Village, they started making their own benches. They didn't wait. And it's a way that it could create an economic stability for some folks, or at least give them some training on how to use carpentry tools. It brings math into it. You had to measure. It's a wonderful initiative. We got knocked back because of the flooding that happened in the Jefferson Chalmers area. But we're no ways near knocked out. We got knocked down but we



didn't get knocked out. And so just recently being asked to host virtual workshops because there's an uptick in covid. What would that look like? Hosting workshops designed just for children on community safety. What does community safety look like from an elementary school level? I was like, I wasn't ready for that. [laughter] But I have to get ready. We're bringing young folks in to have that conversation, that deep education some of the elders right not even possess. Are we ready for that? If they ready, I'm ready.

Tawana Petty: Come on, I know that's right. And I love that covid has to a degree, I mean, we've lost a lot of people that we love and there's something tremendously difficult time, but it has also forced us to reimagine everything, right? And so you and I have talked in the past about how Green Chairs, Not Green Lights, has the entrepreneur component, it has the physicality of having the bench and being able to sit around with your community members and have those deep discussions. You have the pod mapping like you were talking about where you have created a resource where you know what to do in the first 15 minutes of a crisis. In addition to that, we remove the barriers of, you know, Green Chairs, Not Green Lights is accessible in a sense that if you live in an apartment building and you can't have a bench to sit on your front page, we're saying look out for one another, right? We're saying... if you're in a wheelchair, your wheelchair becomes our green bench or whatever mechanism you need to be thinking about what it means to be seen and to turn to another one. And who is your village that's looking out for you. So it's really about the deep dialogues that we have with one another, because we've been relegated to the margins and individualism and we've been conflated surveillance with safety. So we're held up inside our homes with the surveillance cameras and the Ring doorbells and gates and bars and a lot of times we're not looking out for one another. I know when I have dialogues with people, as you were talking about earlier, when is a time you felt safe, I don't think I've ever had anybody say whether the police showed up. What they did say was when I knew my neighbors or when I knew somebody was watching me home from school. Or if my neighbor looks out when I'm coming in late at night. You know, just different situations. When my street is well lit. Not with surveillance cameras. Not with green flashing lights. But just with lights in general. Research shows that if you just light up a neighborhood it increases safety.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: Exactly.

Tawana Petty: So there are so many things we have at our disposal that we just haven't talked about. So I think I have a couple questions. I have a question from the audience, Myrtle.



Myrtle Thompson Curtis: Okay.

Tawana Petty: And Michelle Sullivan asked, what recommendations would you offer to a Black person who identifies as female to feel safe while being Black?

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: What recommendations?

Tawana Petty: Yeah. What would you offer to a Black woman who's having trouble feeling safe?

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: As a Black woman in America, Detroit, I can identify with that feeling. And the way I travel through the world, minimizing my contact with police for sure. And what does that look like? I drive, I make sure my driver's license is in good shape, my car is in good shape. I'm an activist, an organizer in my community. How do I feel safe? You could say my world is pretty small. And those recommendations is to make sure, for me, as I'm getting older, to take care of myself, being as healthy as I possibly can. I have a pod map. If something was to happen to me, there are certain folks in my phone that should be notified right away. I tend not to be frivolous in my speech or in places where I am, you know, invited or, you know, not at home or with relatives. And so I keep my confrontations to a minimum. And I'll be 59 in a few days. I wish these words had been recommended to me when I was a much younger person because I wanted to do what young people do. And there was situations where I found myself unsafe. So my recommendations are to know who you are, have your pod map with your resources of what keeps you safe. Know what those are. And to....I can't say don't be unassuming, but in situations, I have a daughter who was coming home from Dearborn, and she called me in a panic because she was being tailed by the Dearborn police. And the only thing I could tell her at that time, because it shook me to my core, was to keep rolling slowly and go to a...pull in if he's stopping you.... at a well lit place. Do not, do not... I said if anybody anytime gets behind you, pull in to a well lit place. And if you don't have to pull in and slow roll home and turn it into a chase, you can do what you need to do. But do those things you need to do to be safe. Young dear, be blessed.

Tawana Petty: Thank you, Myrtle. I will tell you the pod map changed my life, especially during covid happened and I was still a bit isolated and I was able to sit down and think about who I would call if I needed support? Sometimes you just don't even think about that. You just go on about your day. Then if you end up in the circumstance, you're like what do I do? What do I do? But to have it documented and there available to you, it really does transform the....you know, how you feel.



Myrtle Thompson Curtis: And there are more pieces to the pod map because you rotate your people because folks, situations change. Those folks who might be present for you for this week, 90 days, whatever, may change. So, you know, remember to keep those relationships with those folks and as folks change your pod map may need to change. So you just keep those resources and grow that sickle. But it does make up a world of difference. Because I get panicked and knowing I have something, it just takes a level of anxiety away. And it helps the people in my life because they know this is what needs to happen. We've had those conversations. So communicating with the folks closest to you first, what needs to happen, is a degree of safety.

Tawana Petty: And I'm glad you mentioned that because when you are creating the pod map you're letting folks know, "hey, I'm someone you can count on" or you're asking consent if i'm leveraging in an emergency circumstance. And I imagine... I like the fact that you said rotate because you don't want to overextend, either. You want to, you know, liberally tap into your network.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: And you're tapping in and it's a reciprocal. Because they understand that's a caring, that's caring for one another.

Tawana Petty: Yeah. So what do you have coming up? What's going on? I know you're organizing Green Chairs, Not Green Lights discussion. What's coming up for the Freedom Freedom Growers? Like, I know you have a community event and some other things coming up that you're doing.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: Well, I wrote everything down but that. Thank you. [laughter] And so well, we just ordered one of our conferences a bunch of really sturdy green chairs and we expect those by the 16th. I'm also part of the Eastside Solutionaries Collective and there's a fair coming up at the Genesis Hope site and we'll be doing a Green Chairs, Not Green Lights workshop. Let's see, we do an Art in the Garden every Saturday for the month of September from 1:00 to 4:00 which has been awesome. I Hope the weather holds out. This is the final Art in the Garden with Stephanie Howells, live music, pop up food. Our young people are out working, setting up, breaking down, serving refreshments. Creating art pieces. I'm also part of the Jefferson Chalmers farmers market as a Freedom Freedom representative and I sit on the board of the Jefferson Chalmers farmers market, and we do that right here at the garden site and pavilion site. We do that every other Sunday. This Sunday, the 25th we'll be having our market from 2:00 to 6:00 with beautiful vendors, food demonstrations from a chef. Actually Curtis Renee from the Safety Team is also a wonderful cook. Her style of cooking is Black food love, and she will be demonstrating food this Sunday at 3:30 and right here in the garden. We have a roundup of....we're doing a fish bowl with our young



people, from our youth enrichment camp this summer. Our principle- we studied the principle of Ubuntu.

Tawana Petty: I am because you are.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: I am because you are. And our young people along with their music teacher created a song.

Tawana Petty: Wow.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: They're going to perform it on the 16th at the fair. It's awesome. They have done a wonderful job. So we had these ten young people round up their youth camp. And we had to round up early because of Covid. But we got three strong weeks in but we're going to come together on the 16th and have a fishbowl conversation. Hopefully folks who witness the fish foal we get to join and maybe we'll get some mentors who might want to become mentors for our young people. There's always things happening. We do for volunteer days at the garden at Manistique between 10:00 and 12:00, I've had some wonderful human beings come out every Saturday from 10:00 to 12:00 and volunteer in that space. It's been a lot of feminine energy, which makes for a real quiet gardening day because the masculine energy, they like the power tools. It makes for a different gardening experience. But I appreciate all of it, and I'm really grateful for each and every one of those folks who have showed up. A lot of those folks who showed up participated with creating the benches for Green Chairs, Not Green Lights.

Tawana Petty: Wonderful.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: So it's been a wonderful past two years because of covid we had a lot of people who needed to be out amongst people. And we could social distance safely in the garden, so it just created this really great base of people and our work slowed down but it didn't stop.

Tawana Petty: I just want to lift something up, Myrtle. I've been to numerous, numerous events in the heart of the East side and what is considered what some people would say in the hood, right? In the neighborhood. You've never had police presence at any event that I've ever attended, and there's been hundreds of people. Being in community, sharing resources, sharing food, collaborating, doing community discussions, having political debates. So many various, various events over the 13 years that I've known you and never once have I seen security or police officers. And I've seen beautiful Blackness just being beloved and communal and sharing.



Myrtle Thompson Curtis: At one of our largest events we had the safety team.

Tawana Petty: I was going to say that. I have seen the Detroit Safety Team.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: That's right.

Tawana Petty: Implementing that alternative vision, before it was even really like a popular discussion, right? They've been doing it many years. So it's been pretty incredible. I have about, I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to get to both of these questions. I'm growing to combine these two questions, right? So the gist that I'm getting is that white community members tend to feel safer in police presence. You know, I don't want to generalize, but we can pretty much say that if you go into....even though there's a contradiction, if you go into predominantly white communities a lot of times you don't see a lot of police presence, but there's a kind of a connection that, you know, policing is going to create safety. If they call on police, they're going to come out of that situation safe, for the most part. But an Indigenous population....forgive me if I pronounce this wrong... Maori feel unsafe with policing. And so how can we create a social bridging between the different communities to create collective safety? And I want to layer onto that a little bit because I had two questions. Another one of the questions is talking about and how can non police of color, people non Black, non people of color, so in this instance let's say white. How can white community members help to foster that collective safety when they may feel safe with policing and the communities that don't feel safe with policing, what's the dialogue? And I feel like you have a little bit of this because we navigate that, right? It was really not just a white issue. We live in a city that we just voted down Proposal P because a lot of community members feel like we were taking away policing and they want more policing. So how can we have this dialogue? What needs to happen to create a collective safety.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: Well, I can put it this way. That's stretching my brain all over the place trying to figure out how to have that bridging work. I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing. I'm going to keep.... and when I say "I," I mean the collective. I'm representing the collective. We're going to keep doing what we're doing to create that example and model of what community safety looks like without the law enforcement and the blue uniforms and all of that. We're going to continue to bring the community alternatives, we're going to continue to have these conversations. And I'll give you an example of this prestigious art school here in the city, as we were organizing one of these events for the Art in the Garden, it was suggested that we need the police. Then it was like no. We do not need the police. We can call the Detroit Safety Team and they can train some of our young people if they're short of members. But we cannot use the



police. Well, how are we going to control? What do we need to control? We need to control ourselves and we need to direct. We're going to direct traffic and we're going to respectfully as we can ask small requests of people. But we're not here to control, shut down, and escalate a situation. We want to be inviting to all members of our neighborhood and our community. And so when folks who may be considered white are in these spaces, I hope they feel safe. And if you're not, you are free to go where you feel safe. And i'll tell you, when I'm across the border in Grosse Pointe, I live right down the street, I don't feel so safe. And that just has to be said. So I'm not saying I don't go there.

Tawana Petty: That's a predominantly white affluent community.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: I don't feel safe. So I conduct myself accordingly and I scuttle back to Detroit. Where...

Tawana Petty: The narrative is we shouldn't feel safe here. [laughter]

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: You should feel safe here. And it's no hostility, but I understand. I don't have that sympathy, but, you know, I am not the person who's going to sit in the planning discussion and say we need to involve the police. I'm just not that person. And so we continue on and then we can have some of that conversation. But I am going to continue to live in the alternative. I am going to continue to reimagine, and vision. And if I talk about it, I have to be about it.

Tawana Petty: Thank you, Myrtle.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: You're welcome.

Tawana Petty: It's been tremendously great to be in this dialogue with you. And what I'm taking away from this is that we have to have the discussions, we have to ask the deeper questions, we have to reimagine what a crime is, what is a crime, right? And who was criminalized. We have to challenge these dominant narratives and we have to be an intergenerational activity with one another. So thank you for your tremendous work with Green Chairs, Not Green Lights, with the Freedom Freedom Growers and all of the work that you do as a "yelder." Im still calling you a yelder. And we're deeply grateful for the model and example you have presented for me. And for us all.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: And I want to say thank you to the team for having me here. T, Just keep on going what you're doing. I appreciate you. And it's just an honor to be heard. To be seen, not watched. Just circles like this just reinforce my values and love



of humanity.

Tawana Petty: Asé.

Myrtle Thompson Curtis: Asé.

Brenda Hernandez: Thank you so much, Tawana and Myrtle. So much gratitude for your work and for taking the time to speak with us today. Really thank you for seeing and not watching and showing us how to see and not watch. Thank you to our audience for sharing your energy in the chat. A special thank you to our incredible asl interpreters Lanette and Yakata and our cart captioner Karyn. Share some love for them, please. And also a special thank you to Molly who has been supporting us in the live chats. Our events are recorded and made available in our archive to watch past events and they're more about upcoming events visit bit.ly/seedseries. If you would like to share your thoughts about today's conversation, please go to bit.ly/fall2021feedback. We would love to hear from you and learn with you. Up next, on October 7, we have Dismantling Barriers with the Undocumented Filmmakers Collective, and we're closing this fall season with Performance as Resistance on October 21. Stay tuned for our events and sign up for the AMP Newsletter at alliedmedia.org. Thanks, y'all. Be well. See you soon.

