

# AMP Seed Spring 2021 Season - Bloom

## Event Transcript

### Undocumented & Unafraid

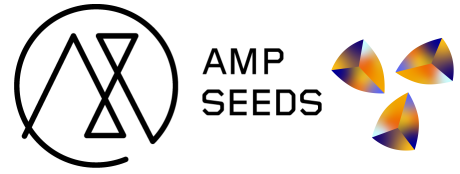
Thursday, May 13th 2021 5pm EST

**Brenda Hernandez:** Hello, my name is Brenda Hernandez. I am excited to welcome you to the Allied Media Projects spring speaker series Bloom, and today's event Undocumented and Unafraid. We're so grateful to share this virtual space with you and our guests Patrice Lawrence, Jennicet Gutierrez, and AirGo. Give them your kudos and love in the chat. Allied Media Projects has been cultivating media for liberation for over 20 years. We'd like to take a minute to acknowledge and uplift the rich history of Detroit, the city we call home. Detroit sits on Anishinaabe land and that of other indigenous people. It is the largest majority black city in the nation with a long legacy of African diasporic global contributions. It was also once a stop on the Underground Railroad known by its code name "Midnight." Detroit is also the city with the largest concentration of Arab Americans. It's a border city with Canada and has a growing Latinx community and a rich legacy of Asian American communities and movements. We encourage you to connect the legacies of your cities and acknowledge the land and communities where you reside. Feel free to name them in the chat. And now without further ado, please join me in welcoming Patrice Lawrence, Jennicet Gutierrez and AirGo.

**Damon Williams:** Thank you so much Brenda. I am Damon, Damon Williams from AirGo. Thank you Allied Media Projects for having us and we are so excited to have this conversation, Undocumented and Unafraid. I also want to shout out my partner in this work and co-host Daniel Kisslinger. What's up, Kiss?

**Daniel Kisslinger:** Hey Damon, good to see you.





**Damon Williams:** Good to see you too. I am so grateful and feel privileged uh that we are here to be having these conversations uh with this, with these amazing people. And so we're going to get right to it, in the tradition that we always do in our work with AirGo. Two-part question. And it's centered around times so define time however you will. So in this time, whether that's this day, this hour, this season, this lifetime, how is the world treating you and how are you the world? And Jennicet we're gonna, we're gonna hear from you first, if you could.

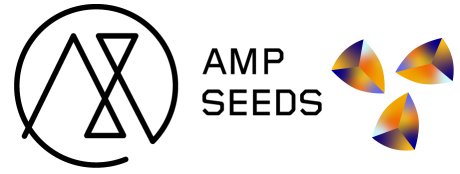
**Jennicet Gutierrez:** Yes thank you Damon. It's an honor to have this conversation with all of you here, today. There's been transitions throughout my life, but I will say over the last four years, it's been really heavy at some points, and finally I am moving in a direction where I am finding some sort of comfort and finding support in different ways. Stability, right, that many of us don't have, so to be able to have uh all those things aligning as we are having this conversation and grounding myself and in the shifts that will come ahead, and just like, it's super you know grateful, and and it's a blessing to be able to feel this transitions in my life.

**Damon Williams:** And Patrice for you in this time, how is the world treating you and how are you treating the world?

**Patrice Lawrence:** Um, well, how am I treating the world? Well today's Eid, so Eid Mubarak, um, to all who are celebrating, and, um, today is a day of, um, of celebration. And in a way, it's kind of hard to feel joy when we're in the middle of what has really been a very very tough month, and a very tough past few days. How the world is treating me is, continuing to see our people be exploited, be pushed out of their homes, be, you know really treated terribly, um but yet having to force myself and our community, having to find joy nevertheless. So, trying to hit back some of that oppression with some good old-fashioned um kickback.

**Daniel Kisslinger:** Yeah shout out to the, shout out to the kickback. Um so before we jump into some of the specifics of what we wanted to ask about, we wanted to kind of set the stage a little bit because I think, you know, conversations around immigration and the experience of undocumented people in this country is something that's talked about a lot, there's a lot of noise, but very rarely discussed you know in meaningful





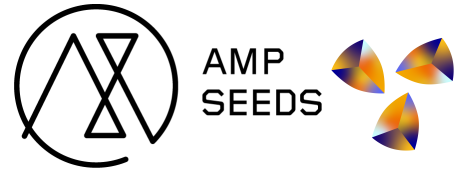
ways, especially for people who do movement work, because the premises of those loudest conversations aren't being challenged. So what do we need to make sure we center in order to really have this conversation in a way that's meaningful and to the root? And that's an open question to either of you.

**Jennicet Gutierrez:** Yes, I think for the second part of the questions, how I'm, you know, I'm treating the world, part of it is, for me, it's through organizing right? And if we really want to see change, if we really want to end transphobia, homophobia, racism, we have to go to the root, and I think, in the last five years that I have been organizer, organizing five years or so, that I have been organizing directly with communities impacted, and myself have been impacted in some way. I think that's where I have been able to find, to write the solutions that communities need. Otherwise we will still continue to make some changes, but not really solve the problem.

And for us is, the demands are very clear from the community, especially undocumented trans women who faced so much of violence, who face so much discrimination, and at times rejection even from their loved ones, right, who are supposed to provide loving care and and take care of them and guide them through the world so I think um, it's it's it's heavy work, it's not easy to do, there are moments when you want to just move on and do something else, basically give up right? But I don't think that is a solution that I've seen. I've seen people really uh taking breaks if they need to but they come back with more energy, with a more clear direction in what is that they want to do.

So for me how I'm sharing the world is just bringing communities together, having conversations with my family about my own identity, really challenging them and they challenge me into: what is it that if we gained some privilege right? What is it that other communities are struggling and don't have what we have? So that is the way um for, for the work that I'm doing, for the vision that we have ahead, that we want to make sure that no one is mistreated, that no one loses their life in detention, in prisons right? For whatever it is that they did, it's, it's unacceptable that people are dying at the hands of this daily, when they're supposed to be protected. So through, through lifting a lot of, you know, the heavy work, through centering the voices of people who are directly impacted by different intersecting identities, this is the way to go forward. And sometimes those positions are very difficult, sometimes those positions are really not





welcomed at the beginning, but as we continue to push and uplift more voices, then we can start seeing how those demands can really become a reality.

**Daniel Kisslinger:** That's beautiful. So what I'm, what I'm hearing is the centering of the demands that are coming from the people who are doing the work, and an understanding of the ways that the personal and intimate relationships can be a space of that political work. Is that all right?

**Jennicet Gutierrez:** Absolutely.

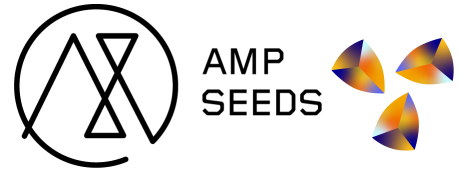
**Daniel Kisslinger:** How about for you, Patrice, what do we need to make sure we center, in, in order to have this conversation in a useful and grounded way?

**Patrice Lawrence:** I think just, um, remembrance that people who are undocumented come from all different backgrounds, so it's really best to not assume. Anyone can be undocumented, anyone, truly. It's, it's just it's just a word, it's just a flaw in a system, um and some may say it's a design of a system. Um, and I think, also, just to like, listen, listen really keenly. We have to listen to folks when we talk about our pain, when we talk about the words that we choose for ourselves and the way that we choose to describe what we're going through. If we start there, open and listening, you got it.

**Damon Williams:** That's beautiful so, that's such, a great grounding for us to, to continue this conversation. I want to shout out, you know, all the folks who are watching on the live stream and then for the people uh for the months and years listening to this podcast, uh, we're really grateful for you to being here bearing witness to this conversation, and even this is a small step of commitment into growing further, in you know, this collective push for justice and liberation.

And so with those grounding frameworks uh, one more question for both of you before we even get a little bit more specific, um think, you know, the world is so tough, as we we opened up with, but one of the things in movement that I've been really excited by in the last couple years is, I feel like I'm experiencing, observing, a greater emphasis on black and indigenous solidarity and black and brown solidarity and movements in the street on different issues whether it's state violence, uh whether it is within the economy, and it's important I think when we're talking about the solidarity





that we center immigration and the experience of undocumented people, to make sure that we have the most holistic or the most to-the-root radical conversation. And so how does centering particularly maybe borderless experiences or solutions that are maybe outside of like hyper-nationalist structures, how can we learn um to have more in-depth conversation and build more space for solidarity, that is, if we center this notion of citizenship and border in a way that uproots, uh some of the oppressive norms that that uh have been expanding it seems? And I'll throw that to you first again, Jennicet, or no are you ready Patrice? You want to hop in there?

**Patrice Lawrence:** Yeah I can do it, please. Um, I think one is just a reminder that citizenship is not freedom right? I'll say it again, citizenship is not freedom. And we know that especially as black folks, right, because if it was, then we wouldn't have to be marching in the streets and we wouldn't have to be fighting tooth and nail just to live. Just to literally have life, right?

Um, so I think that's like, that's that on citizenship, and I think the other piece on, like, oppressive systems, oppressive systems are not new. The way they function, the way they operate, are mostly the same. A lot of systems learn from each other, so, you know, I mentioned at the beginning about what's going on with Palestine, what folks may not know or they may know, is that police, the same police that are creating those oppression, work together with United States police, and they train each other. They learn from each other, and they use the same tactics on us here in America that they use there in Palestine.

So borders are important, and they're not, and I say this as a very proud Jamaican, right? Like, I'm so Jamaican it's not funny. I love my country. Um, and yet I understand that, that construct of a border and of nationalism and of patriotism and all these different pieces can really be weaponized and be used to tear apart people's livelihoods, and that all countries are not created equal. The power of the United States passport, the power of passports of the global north versus the global south, if that's still even a term in the 21st century. Even that really tells you about the bias and what bought them that power, the fact that I cannot be able to travel as freely as I would like to unless you get some paperwork. A flimsy card, a flimsy paper from a government that specializes in demolishing and destroying countries, and shaping them up to how they want them to be, like... that's just messed up! That's really messed up, and so that's what we're talking about when we talk about borders. Like we have to understand how



this thing was man-made and created with the idea of having some people have a lot and having many people have nothing, so that those people can continue to feed their greed. Um, and it's really rooted in white supremacy in a way that is profound and beyond anything that we could discuss in five minutes.

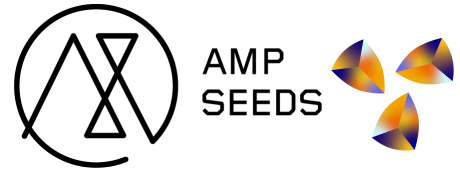
**Daniel Kisslinger:** Well, luckily, we got a little bit longer, so we got some time, but it is a lot for sure. Jennicet, anything you wanna you wanna add to that?

**Jennicet Gutierrez:** Yes, I think that is the way to go forward. Solidarity is fundamental, and as undocumented LGBTQ people of color, undocumented trans women specifically, it is essential to stand in solidarity with other struggles, but also other people need to stand in solidarity with us, right? And how do we do that, by listening. I think listening to what people are going through, to the injustices that are happening in the United States, right, that they're supposed to be providing protections whether it's about human rights, and all these beautiful things they talked about, but in reality, in the backyards, they're torturing people.

So I think the solidarity is fundamental in the way that they are feeling it, how powerful it has become, not only in the US through Black Lives Matter movement, through other issues that have been, especially during the Trump administration, that mobilized so many people, the Muslim community, uh, Asian, you know, people being under attack, so I think for us to come together collectively and and form those alliances, right? To really shift.

And, um, something that Damon mentioned is justice and liberation. It's something that people have been asking for so many years, hundreds and hundreds of years, even, you know, through different civilization, and we have yet to see fully that justice, we have yet to see fully that liberation, right? And, and to, in order to make that happen we need to really again go back to the root causes of poverty. We need to go back to the root causes of what's causing gender violence, to, why are people fighting for, for land? For oil? For all these things, right? And it comes down to, uh, through controlling, right, through fear to exploitation. But the moment you start on the ground listening, people are not comfortable. People want significant change, and the moment you start giving opportunities to the voices especially that have not been centered, voices that have not been heard, is when we really are going to break through and start





seeing what so many people have fought hard, right, our ancestors have been fighting and screaming for so long.

Um, in the 60s, we saw a massive civil rights movement in this country that, you know, and here we are, 2021, and we're still, you know, people are being, black people specifically are being shot, you know, gunned down on camera. So now that's raised in a different consciousness. So as we continue to move forward and, you know, do the, the work, it's like, for me, it's extremely important to, to understand what my role is. It's important to understand the history of where my people have been, and to honor that, right?

I think right now the visibility with the trans communities is really, uh, at the highest point, but also that the murders are really, really, it's an epidemic. It's really devastating. We're also seeing major anti-trans legislation around the nation in different states, targeting the youth that are trying to find their place in the world, and now they're being told they can't be themselves, right? So again, solidarity is the key, going to the voices of the people that are being heavily impacted by social injustices and decriminalization and dehumanization.

**Damon Williams:** Thank you for that historical framing, uh, Jennicet. I think that really, uh, helps us go further in this discussion. Uh, and so, Patrice, coming out of that, I have a question for you, and it's about black liberation. And so I feel really fortunate to come up in a lineage that is grounded in the black queer feminist tradition that was teaching that, as the language of Black Lives Matter is emerging, we actually have a need to say that “all black lives matter”, uh, because we see historically and contemporarily the ways in which women's leadership is either erased or overlooked, or the marginalization of queer and trans communities within the black identity, or within the black experience, and so from that framework of centering marginalized experiences, uh, we began to learn more that immigration is a black issue.

But I feel like that understanding is limited, and sometimes scarce or sparse, and so I want to ask how we can, within the the work of black liberation movement, better center, uh, the experiences of undocumented black folks, and particularly, how do we name some of the unnamed or invisible privileges that black us citizens have, whether it's domestically or within the global diaspora? So, how do we, you know, address some of that privilege in the the mission of making sure we are centering the experience of undocumented black folks as we are working for liberation?





**Patrice Lawrence:** Got it. So how do we address, um, yeah, how to address the differences as we, as we're centering liberation? So I'll give, like, a story. So you know like, if you drive, right, you know driving while black. So let's say you're driving while black and you get pulled over, right? So many things can happen in that moment. Um, so many things can happen and so many things have happened. When you're undocumented, there's just an addition to that, which is that you may never ever go home to your family. That, you know, the end of deportation, right? So it's the same discrimination, um, but then just a little bit more, the more layers that you add on.

So if you have a really thick accent, um, then they probably will, the police might think, "Okay, well you are not from here," and so you get more scrutiny right away. If you are, um, visibly LGBT or they think you might be, then you face discrimination, you're misgendered, like, then that's another layer on top of it. Then it's just layer upon layer upon layer upon layer, and I think if we really think about it, we already know that, right? Because within the whole black population, undocumented or not, there's different layers you know, that, right? Like somebody who gets pulled over, who has like a record, is at more risk than somebody who isn't. Somebody who gets pulled over who's dark skin is at more risk than someone who isn't. Someone who gets pulled over and they're in a rich white neighborhood is that more risk... let me pause there, actually, that doesn't always work that way.

**Daniel Kisslinger:** It gets complicated.

**Patrice Lawrence:** Yeah, right? It depends on where you are, it depends on where you are. But you follow my drift, you know what I mean? And so if you start from there, then it becomes a little easier to, like, peel back and to realize that this thing isn't so foreign. Now that's the grounding. Once we get there, then we figure out, "Okay, what exactly is being done to black undocumented people?" So, one, we're seen as a threat, right? So we're seen as a threat, and undocumented people in general, foreignness in general, is a threat if you're not white, especially, in this country, right?

And post-9/11, the laws that they put in place, the pieces that they put in place. ICE was created after 9/11. ICE was created in our lifetimes, right? And that's immigration, customs, and enforcement. And the way how that has been weaponized, the way how, um, private companies have profited off of our bodies being detained and



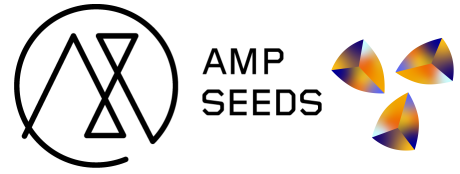


deported, is just exorbitant. It's really terrible, right? So, one, we're seen as a threat and we're seen as a profit. We're absolutely seen as a profit. And then, like, we're also the ones, our stories are talked about, right, is not always in a frame of liberation, which is why I appreciate spaces like this where we get to tell our own, because otherwise, it's like, "Oh yeah, you should really care about undocumented black people, because..." and the "because" is not they're human, full stop. 'Cause that's what I'd like, like, I'm human! So can you just listen to me? But it has to be an addition: "Because we feed your children, because we till your farm, because we take care of your homes." You know? And so we're a commodity, right? So we're so many things. We're a commodity, we're a threat, we're profitable, like, we're so many things other than being human. And I think for us at UndocuBlack, we just want to be seen as human and having inherent worth and dignity.

**Daniel Kisslinger:** I want to build off what you were just saying, uh, that, that profit positioning, both the profit, the, the profit potential of containment but then also the profit potential of labor for the people enforcing these laws and these systems of white supremacy. Um, and I think you, you alluded to a couple of them, um, but when I think about what types of labor are left out of large-scale labor organizing that's been kind of invited within the state, um, you know, we know that land workers and food workers are excluded, and we know that domestic workers are excluded, and those are two areas that are predominantly made up of undocumented people, especially geographically. It depends, but for the most part, those are two areas where there are a lot of undocumented workers. What types of labor and, and what issues in relation to labor are raised and exploited from the conversation because of anti-blackness? And in the case of uh, I think probably both of them, uh, misogyny and, um, masculine supremacy, misogyny as well.

**Patrice Lawrence:** Um, I'll answer a little bit and then Jennicet. Um, I think, well, one, I'll say you mentioned those labor and they want to keep you there, so I myself for many years before the formation of UndocuBlack, I served in domestic work. And it wasn't because I had no other choice, but it was because I had no other choice, if you follow my drift. And so they would have preferred that I stay there, right? They would have preferred that I stayed there, that I stayed underground, that I stayed without making a voice heard and that we stayed without forming a community like UndocuBlack, where





together we could be strong, where together we could boost each other up and together we could advocate for our rights, and so six years later here we are. Um, and then, in terms of... tell me the other part of the question.

**Daniel Kisslinger:** Um, what pieces of conversations around labor are raised and exploited because of both anti-blackness and misogyny?

**Patrice Lawrence:** So I think the pieces about labor where, one, that around domestic work in, in particular the fact that like we are underpaid, you cannot access things like retirement, you cannot access, uh, health insurance for the most part, you cannot, uh, talk if your employer is, is, is abusing you, because who are you gonna complain to? What systems? It's not just the police. Every type of social service is police. Like that's the way this country's set up. Everywhere that you're supposed to go for help that is, um, attached to the state in any way shape or form is police, and is policing, and means that you put your life in jeopardy. So as long as that continues and as long as anti-blackness permeates those institutions, whereas a black person coming, you're seen as a threat, then you're at risk, and then you're just like caught in a really, really hard place.

**Daniel Kisslinger:** Building off of that, Jennicet, um, to that same question, around what types of labor are erased as, as a result of misogyny? And I'd add homophobia, transphobia, other things of that nature.

**Jennicet Gutierrez:** Before getting into that, I think it's important to mention that my worth shouldn't be defined by capitalist standards, right? Meaning if I'm able-body, because of the discrimination, because of the transphobia and the homophobia that this system upholds through different, um, oppressive ideologies right? It's that if you you can do this type of labor, like doing, you know, farm work, you can do service, you can do housekeeping, different places right, which is what dominates the conversation, but you start challenging that and moving in a different, um, labor piece, like for example, to go into like law or business or something like that, it's like not expected, right, of, of people of color in this country.

So the labor movement, it's, it's a very, um, it's like we have to understand that this country was built on exploitation, and as we continue to move forward it will



continue to exploit people based on, on their gender, based on their sex, based on their immigration status right? So, um, for the community, a specifically trans woman, like if you're having labor conversations and you don't center black sex workers, you're doing a disservice because they're facing so much. Sometimes they wish they had opportunities to even enter this, uh, sector of work, of labor, that are seen as, you know, people are treated fairly and things like that. But sometimes trans folks in their non-conformity don't even get to that point right? We can't even have this conscience about equal pay when we don't have a secure job. So there's a lot of gaps that are missing in this conversation.

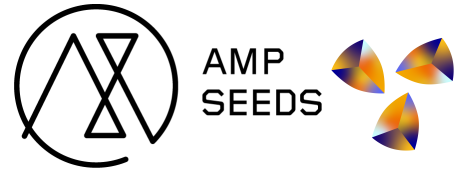
Personally, I remember when I came to this country and didn't have documentation, I was, you know, started doing different, different, um, jobs, right, from throughout the time that I was adjusting to the change, and one time, I went to this office and the guy that was hiring people, he's like, "This is the script, I just need you to read it and do eight hours a day. But I want to be very clear. First I have to make sure that I'm getting enough money to take care of my family and things like that, and if there's any money left, then you, you will get paid." You know what I mean? And with a very limited English that I knew at the time, I knew that his intentions were not good.

So imagine the magnitude that is happening now as 11 million undocumented people are part of this country, they're contributing in some way, right? And you know the, the unfairness that exists in, in accessing certain types of jobs. But again I think, I think the trans community, we have seen through organizing how they are really challenging, right, through, through at the decriminalisation of sex work and sex work is work. That, sometimes, it's even uncomfortable to think about that because they're, like, already attacking your humanity, and no, you just want to be doing that for this other reasons or whatever. But when you start listening to them, it's just like, many don't have any other choice right?

And that's what, um, the only options that they have. So it's, it's again so much work that needs to be done, and the end goal should not be, "What is that that you can contribute? What is the work that you can give?" It's like, you are here, you're a human being, and you have every right to exist whether you produce labor or not. People need to be treated with dignity and respect.

**Damon Williams:** So thank you both for, you know, what I'm really receiving is this framing of the power dynamics, right, and how these oppressive systems, uh, are





exploiting and creating this inequity. Uh, but then also, you know, we're hearing the, the seeds and the sparks of this resilience, and the survival and, and this organizing work and that's really where I want to ground, uh, to go a little bit deeper in the learning is in the work.

So I want to bring in UndocuBlack and Familia and what's going on right now to kind of help frame or ground this conversation. Um, and before we get into just, like, what are the campaigns and the efforts that are under work, uh, the, the framing I want to offer is, how do we use this work as like a landscape for transformative learning? Because I believe that, it is in the struggles for liberation that humanity is expanded and transformed, and uh, it is the struggle, is the best classroom to be honest, uh, from my perspective.

And so I'm curious for both of you, uh, whether it's in the work around DACA right now or the, um, End Trans Detention campaign, what are you learning right now from these efforts? What transformation are you observing, uh, as you also share some of the, you know, the basic information that people need to know to be able to support, uh, these campaigns or other efforts? And I'll throw that back to you Jennicet, and then, and then we'll hear from Patrice.

**Jennicet Gutierrez:** Yeah, um, the End Trans Detention campaign is something Familia has led over the last seven years in collaboration with other national groups, with local groups, and part of the the demand is to release trans people from detention, uh, people living with HIV, and eventually end all detention. So the campaign is connected to the broader, um, you know demand of ending, um, abuses in immigration detention centers across the country, to ending the abuses that trans folks or LGBTQ people face in prisons, right? So there is, uh, the work that we've done over the years has been through base building, really going to places where our people are, and bringing people together. Doing, um, a weekend retreat, a few days, making sure that the goal of Familia TQL and Familia Trans Queer Liberation movement is to, you know, organize, advocate, and educate for our people, right? Especially Latinx folks, and how do we go into, um, ending all of this injustices?

And it's, it's not easy again, it's very difficult, but I think by centering the voices by, um, forming alliances with other groups, and also for us as the Latinx community, understanding those connections with, like, oppression through anti-blackness right? Like how do we look at the border in U.S.-Mexico? There's a lot of, like, Haitian black



migrants who are still waiting for years, and are the ones that are being deported the most, of the ones that aren't given, you know, asylum cases. So I think the End Trans Detention campaign is, it's a very, it's a very, uh, strong campaign, to say that if we can achieve to end trans detention we can move into the broader demand of ending all deportations for all people in this country, right? So um, as we speak, we're having people coming, I know we're in the middle of a pandemic or moving in a direction that many things have been lifted, we've been very cautious to bring leaders from across the country to strategize and see what is the next static campaign. How are we going to move forward? And also listening to them and let them shape the strategy, letting shape the solutions that, that we need to have, right? And it's, it's, it's continuous, and hopefully as we move into Pride month, we can be very clear in what the campaign is about and how, what is it that we need to do to achieve the demand and be able to end detention once and for all?

**Damon Williams:** So, just a little bit of a follow-up to that. Um, for you personally or maybe, you know, with your like internal squad, uh, are there particular learnings or challenges that are, um, helping you grow in your consciousness, or in your leadership, or even in your understanding of these systems that we are resisting and working to transform?

**Jennicet Gutierrez:** Yeah. Every time you share space, you share a conversation with anyone else that you are building, that you are organizing, you always learn and bring something valuable to your work, right? You, you bring something valuable through organizing.

And for me, it's been really, um, it's given me a lot of hope. It's been very empowering to see how in, in a short time, we have been able to achieve wins through different campaigns that we have launched nationally, or people that were detained that challenge the narrative of the good versus bad immigrant, right? Meaning like, if you have a clean record, if you don't have any arrests, if you have been working, if you have been paying your taxes, like, you are given a priority. But for the organization, it doesn't matter if you have a record or not, like, we're fighting for all of us.

So the campaign has been going for over the last seven years, and, yes, to see the visibility of trans immigrant leadership, especially undocumented trans women, mobilizing and really speaking their truth, right? Just to see that again in a short time,



it's been very rewarding for me. And I'm also learning something right, like, now that we are talking about immigration. What other issues are you dealing with, what is that, what is the next move beyond the End Trans Detention campaign, right?

And I guess it's, it's part of it, like, paying attention to what's happening in the world, what's happening in Colombia, what's happening in Palestine, what's happening at the state level here, with the, uh, trans youth, and these, uh, conservative republicans coming out with this legislation. So there's a lot of room.

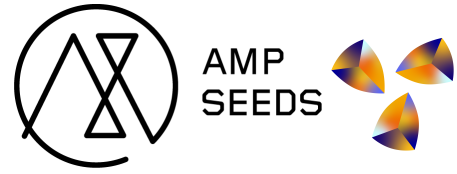
So as we continue to grow and organize, it's like, how do we pluck more people in? How do we support and uplift the leadership to be able to truly transform lives, right? I mean, that transformation is personal, because you are seeing how a life is being saved rather than being murdered, right? Because we have faced with trans death for so long, and it is time that we are given a chance, that we're given opportunities to be able to exist unapologetically, and to thrive, right, and, and be able to have a fulfilling lives.

**Damon Williams:** Thank you for that. And so, Patrice, same question, um, for you, you know, and UndocuBlack, uh, what is the work right now and how is it moving you? Are there particular lessons or transformative experiences that you are participating and/or observing, whether that be in your work around DACA or other issues that that center undocumented black folks?

**Patrice Lawrence:** Thanks. I'll start on DACA. So we just launched a video that is available on all of our platforms at Undocublack (u-n-d-o-c-u-b-l-a-c-k). Um, that is a, that it, that uses, um, that, that we paired up with the hard of hearing committee, the deaf and hard of hearing community to do that video, and the point of it is to really let folks know that all qualifying black immigrants of all backgrounds are eligible for DACA, right? And that folks should be aware of that, and we should take advantage of that, because there's a lot of bad, and there is some good now. We know that with DACA, you may not be eligible depending on, uh, run-ins you may have had with the police, and what that may have led to, and at the same time, there is leniency for some of that. Having DACA will allow folks to have a fast track if and when—and I'm gonna do a strong on the when—we pass legalization citizenship for all. And that's a really important thing.

So I want my people to have a leg up. I want my people to be able to get into the jobs that they want, get that health insurance, get advanced parole, and go travel, go





see your grandma that you haven't seen in however long of a time. Go have that freedom, just a little taste of it, that we've been robbed off for so very long. And I want all of us, as black folks, to be able to get that. And I think that one of the things that we're working on UndocuBlack is to make sure that it's accessible for everyone, that we are organizing hard. As the black community, the statistics show that there are a few black people with DACA but not enough, and not nearly enough of the people who are actually eligible for it, and that's because of organizing, right? So we weren't around in 2012, we weren't even around in 2015. But 2016 and onward, we're doing our part, and now that DACA is back, we're making sure that people are fully aware of what is eligible for them.

The second piece is, like, you know, we want to win. We want to win different pieces, we want to win big, right? Like, who doesn't want to win. But what's really important, too, is how you win, and the care that comes after that win. So for instance, we've talked a lot and we're pushing about the Liberian green card bill that we helped to get passed with the Liberian community and organizers all across this country towards the end of 2019. One of the only ones in the past two decades.

And that's a win, that's huge, but almost two years since and we have fought for an extension so people have until December to apply. Enough people haven't applied, and USCIS, uh, the citizenship agency that processes the green cards, they have created obstacle after obstacle after obstacle so that people cannot submit their applications. And so, it's not just good enough for us to say we got a policy win, organizing works, advocacy. We're going beyond that, and so we are partnering, continue to partner, with the Liberian organizers to make sure that people know that they should apply, and that we are demanding that USCIS reverse these Trump policies that have no business being there, so we can get all our people what's due to them. Because I want my people to be able to be free.

**Damon Williams:** Just interjecting quick, I'm gonna throw it to Daniel for a question, but just something I want to name, right, just in hearing those answers about the work. One, just like I believe, right, like, I believe that we will win, um, and for folks watching or for folks who maybe will get this audio later. I'm just, in your faces, I just saw like a brightening up, and an excitement and a passion, um, and a joy that you have in this work. So there's just, like, something I want to name, or kind of be a proxy for the audience right now, before we keep going. Just in hearing y'all talk about the work, um,





there is, one, just a level of faith that I have in our, in people, our people in the largest sense of the word, um, and y'all are doing it. So yeah, imma toss it to, to the homie, but, uh, I'm feeling the joy and I'm feeling the courage when y'all talk about your work, and I'm honored.

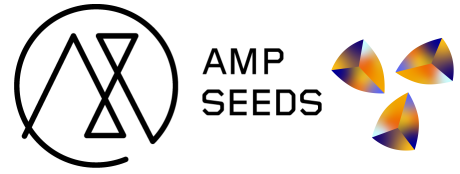
**Daniel Kisslinger:** Yeah, absolutely, and my question, actually, is directly related to that. You know, the topic for the, uh, event, in the name was “Undocumented and Unafraid”, and I want to talk about that “unafraid” idea for a second. And shout out to the, the person watching at home who threw this in the chat and got, got the wheels turning. Um, but, you know, we've been talking a lot on the show, and just Damon and I, about this distinction between “bravery” and “courage”. Um, and bravery, one definition being: doing something that you're afraid to do, but doing it anyway. And courage is when that thing is no longer something that gives you fear. Um, and I think, in that courage, there's room for joy and celebration, a process, and some of that transformation in a different way. So I'm curious for y'all, um, how has your relationship, both personally and in the movement work, to fear changed in, in the years that you've been doing this work? And is there anything that started out feeling brave that now is feeling pretty courageous?

**Jennicet Gutierrez:** Yeah I think for the trans community as, again, as we become more visible nationally in the U.S., like, we're not new. Like we're all of a sudden, “Oh my god, these people, who are they?” You know, trans people have existed for centuries, right? Even before colonization came to this part of the world, like, there were a variation of gender expression that existed in indigenous lands across the continent here and, and throughout, right, the world.

So those words I get attached, like, when you live your truth, when you're, uh, going out the door, because a lot of times that could be the last time you leave, right? Like going out the door can be your death sentence, or sometimes, not even going out the door, sometimes in your home you can get murder, right? And then when you see the visibility of trans people in different spaces that you go, and see people, like, and then you do something courageous, it's like, “Wow, she's brave” or “They're brave” and “They're courageous.”

But again, the end goal is to let people be themselves, to let them exist as they are unapologetically, right, so as I continue to speak my truth, I'm also learning new





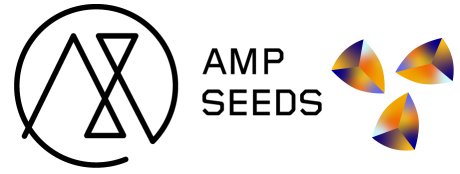
revelations, right? I'm also learning secrets in, in my own inner personal circle with loved ones, and I think the more we are able to be ourselves, whether you are trans or however identify, you embrace sexuality, those words shouldn't have the heavy lift that they have for now, right? So, um, I guess, you know, thinking about trans immigrant women specifically, all the challenges that we have to face, you know, sometimes crossing two, three borders, some of them are still in the process of figuring their identities, right? And to just embark in that dangerous, you know, journey, to come to the U.S. and a, a lot, you know, the campaign, it's moving.

And I think it's important to honor the life and legacy. I couldn't, like, do justice to the work or the campaign if I don't honor the life of Victoria Adeyano who died in ICE custody in 2007, and she was living with HIV, Roxanna Hernandez, 33, living with HIV, who also died in ICE custody in 2018, and you know Joanna Medina on June 1st, 2019, she died of similar circumstances. Right? So people living with HIV, with all the advances that we have now, it's not a death sentence, but when they were in custody, they'd lose their lives. And so many other people have lost their lives in ICE custody. So if we look at their, their, their journeys, on lives, you can see how much dreams and goals they have, and how brave and courageous they were to exist, as, as they were able to fight for their existence. They were able to to seek that dangerous route to be able to stay here with us, and they're no longer with us, right?

So I want to challenge people to really, as you figure out who you are, then, as you see trans people, you see that we are more than just our, our identity. We are more than just our sexuality, that we have so much to offer, and we can make a really significant difference that can benefit all of us, right, if you put aside your, your prejudice that you've been fed, whether through different spaces, or, or however you get the information. So I think for me, as we move forward, we can embrace those, but also we can break away from those, and see that we are in our full right to exist as human people.

**Patrice Lawrence:** Yeah I'll go. Um, I think that we can't talk about being courageous, I suppose, without being brave, and you can't talk about being courageous without talking about justice, right? So by your definition, I'm working with it, trying to learn. Um, so if, if being brave is doing something that you're afraid of, right, then let's say five years ago, a lot of us, and a lot of us in UndocuBlack, coming out and telling anyone we





were undocumented, where we were from, what status we had, we were brave for doing that, right?

And then now, within our spaces, uh, it doesn't like, I know for me and for many of us, it's not a source of the fear anymore. But that's because there is some promise of justice. And not because Joe Biden said so, but because we create the pathway, we create the way, we are changing the systems to make it for ourselves, and we also create safe spaces for ourselves.

So that's justice. Justice is having more than enough, right, that we need to sustain ourselves, and not having to worry about resources. And we have created that justice for ourselves in the past year with the COVID-19 pandemic. As we lost our jobs, as our family members lost their jobs, as people were not able to move freely even less than we could have before, UndocuBlack banded together, and they put, we put our money where our mouth is, our own selves, right?

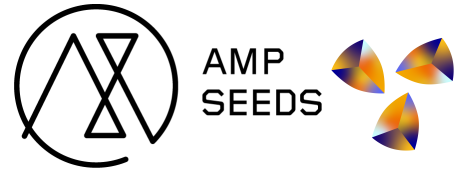
And then other community members as well, because we weren't going to get that government check. we still haven't gotten it, right? And so we were able to feed ourselves, to pay our own rent, to be able to continue to get access to resources. We figured out: where are the free clinics that will give the COVID test, that we can get COVID vaccines, that we can get what we need for our families, right?

And in those types of spaces where we now feel safe, because justice is being served there, then that meant that we could be courageous. Because it's not a source of fear anymore, because you're gonna get what is due to you. You're gonna get the justice that is due to you, right, and so that's, for me, being undocumented and being unafraid means having a safe space to do that in, and having justice promised to me and created for me, um, along the way. And that's been really really helpful.

**Damon Williams:** I'm just, a minute, a minute, I'm feeling it. I'm, like, swimming in, in the hope. And where I want to end, because unfortunately I have this conversation for like 15 hours. We could just do this all day, uh, but one last kind of question or framing for both of y'all to close with, and it's, uh, under one of the, you know, themes of this event or conversation, of freedom dreams.

And so, you know, Robin Kelly's "freedom dreams" talks about this history of visioning or projecting a world beyond what is often currently possible, um, as a guide post of the work, but more importantly as a way to sustain our humanity. Uh, and so I





wanna hear or close with, uh, relative to, to these issues and systems we've been talking about, what are your freedom dreams, uh, for this space?

And particularly, I think we, we are clear of how the U.S. nation-state, through this notion of citizenship, border, and immigration, affirm settler colonialism, white supremacy, and state violence in relationship to people, but I think it's also important that we include how this system also destroys the land. And so, in talking about your freedom dreams, I want to also make sure we're talking about the relationship between people, and also the healing work that the land requires, as we are building our liberatory future. So that's a long way to say: what are your freedom dreams for this place, given all that we are struggling against?

**Patrice Lawrence:** Man, I feel like we need, like, a chat or something. We do, we do. You know, my background is in theater, so that is totally my, my practice, my way to go. Sometimes it's easier to sing and to chant than it is, um, than it is to talk. And to talk in patois, which is, I'm Jamaican. To do that, that's freedom.

If I had my way— I actually had this conversation with someone the other day who was in UndocuBlack and connected with folks, that I realized have, like, a musical background, or a theater background, you know. I was like, “If we had our way, what would we be doing right now? What work would give us joy?” And I know for me, I'd go into musical theatre. I'd be on Broadway. Why am I here? I would go be on Broadway, perhaps. And that's not to say I don't love what I do. I love my job. I love UndocuBlack. I love organizing. I love being in community, right? But if I were truly unbothered, if we were truly, truly unbothered, what would we do, and how would we turn that into a liberatory practice, right? How would we use that to tell the stories of the land, and to tell the stories of the land that we come from, and the land that we've come to inhabit, and the stories that we've learned from the people who used to inhabit this land, who were pushed out, right?

Talking about being indigenous, being indigenous as black people. Black people are indigenous, no matter where they're from, they're indigenous, right? When we talk about people who are Native Americans, or indigenous to this land, and the oppression that was tried out on them, and then tried out on black people, and tried out on the enslaved, and tried out on immigrants now, and tried out on trans folks, and then goes down the line, down the line, down the line, and then it's tried out with all levels, and just multiply its oppression. I want to be able to tell that story, but tell the story not



because it is helping me to fight for my freedom, but because I'm already free. So I'm telling the stories that I'm reminding future generations to not replicate the mistakes of the people before.

That's my freedom dream. That I could do that, record that, and then go home in Jamaica and go chill on a beach, right? That I can then bring those stories and those lessons learned to my father and enjoy his years, enjoy my parents that I have missed and have not been with for over a decade, that I get to have life with them and some of those years because God has blessed them with long life, and I want to enjoy them before they die. I want to have children, and I want to not worry about the fact that if I go pick up my child from school I might not be able to go back home because, oh, I'm driving undocumented. I want to be free and I want our people to have that too. I want us to have small joys, and big joys, and everything in between, and to have a land and a home and peace and freedom. To travel, to be, to love. That's my dream. It's our collective dream.

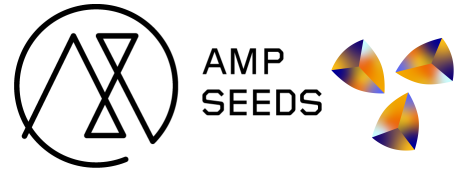
And I believe that we can't get there unless we band together, because that's what liberation looks like. It's collective freedom, and it's really, really important that we band together, and that we not repeat the patterns of our oppressors. So that means coming to understand what is internalized oppression, that means coming to understand homophobia, that means coming to understand anti-black racism. And that it's beyond just a term, but it becomes a practice that we will not repeat, so that we can really really really really be free, and I can get my dream of living on Broadway.

**Daniel Kisslinger:** Broadway and the beach. That's the two spots. It's the perfect spots. It was great. Uh, Jennicet, uh, how about, for you, uh, in regard to land or just in general. What is this freedom dream for you?

**Jennicet Gutierrez:** Yeah, um, I think I have a tremendous responsibility of the visionary work of so many freedom fighters, right, that created a vision for a better world, a better treatment of people, and to honor the humanity, right, of people who have faced so many injustices, so many abuses, and have been murdered violently. And I think that responsibility keeps me going into my own division of what the work that I'm doing has taught me, has grounded me into what I do now.

I remember as Patrice was sharing her vision like, I was thinking about my own childhood, right, my mom. I grew up in a single home environment, very traditional. We





grew up Catholic, so the idea of having a transgender child was completely like, oh my god, that's not possible. But you know, now, as I'm living in my truth, my mom tells me stories of my childhood. I also visioned myself as a choreographer, right? That I wanted to, to dance, I wanted to be on the stage. I wanted to entertain people. I wanted to help people find their joy through, through art, through dancing, and I think in some way organizing is giving me the stage to be able to, to save lives and transform lives—my own and the community, right. So I never saw myself as an organizer. I never saw myself that I was going to be, you know, connecting nationally, and having an impact in the community, but obviously the reality is way different. The obstacles and the challenges that the trans people face makes it very difficult to have those visions become a reality, maybe, in our lifetimes.

But the work that we do is, again, what the previous generation of freedom fighters did. I'm able to have these conversations, I'm able to exist, I'm moving the world in a little less, right, not so violent way. But it's still very violent, right? So the vision that I see myself is that we accomplish what we are fighting for, with the End Trans Detention campaign, that we release trans people in detention throughout the country, that we release people living with HIV, that we shut down ICE, that we shut down all detention centers, and use those buildings given to the community that are in need and transform them, and show you what really a truly holistic society is about, right? That we shut down borders, that we stop killing each other because of the land, because of oil, that there's so much resources that the earth giving us that we can sustain a brighter future for the generations to come.

So for me, is that we have that vision, that we have that respect, and that as trans people exist, you honor how sacred we are, and you recognize the healing that we bring into your fear and into the injustices you put upon us. Thank you.

**Daniel Kisslinger:** Oh so beautiful. Both of you, thank you, um, and I just, I look forward to moderating the talk back after the play, uh, that Jennicet does the choreography for, uh, and that Patrice you, you direct and, and are the the star of. That's going to be a great talk. And this has been so wonderful. Damon, is there anything you want to add before we get out of here?

**Damon Williams:** Yeah this is just, um, so moving, and just another— I keep using the words “fortunate” and “privilege” and “honor” because that's what I feel, because in



this conversation, I am reaffirmed in the feeling that a new world is possible. Um, and as we discuss the ways that this nation-state formation around the globe is expanding racial capitalism, cis-het patriarchy, carceral militarism, uh, it is clear that we have to create new structures to govern the relationships between human beings, and how we exist on this planet and with these resources.

And so, just hearing your story, um, and seeing your spirit and learning more about your work, uh, makes me feel more confident in naming that and pushing us towards that new possibility. So I just, I'm so grateful, uh, and yeah, you know, thank you so much and, and, and we, um, need to continue dreaming about freedom, uh, because that's how we make it real.

**Daniel Kisslinger:** Thank you both so much, uh, thank you to Allied Media Projects for having us. Make sure that you follow the work of the UndocuBlack Network as well as Familia. You can follow AirGo (a-i-r-g-o) on all your podcast apps and at AirGo radio everywhere. Um, yeah, any, any plugs or any other info that you want to make sure it gets included? We'll also have it all in the, in the show notes as well.

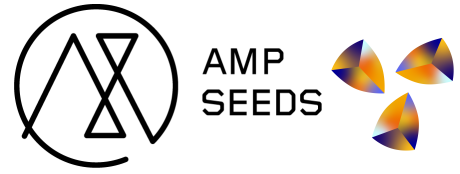
**Patrice Lawrence:** For me, continue to show up. Don't just be an ally, be an accomplice. If you are listening to this and you are black and undocumented, consider making UndocuBlack your political home. We can use more people. We know there are more of us out there, and we need to be combined together. And, uh, to all the colleagues, Jennicet, who has been in this fight from day one, uh, and many others, um, like you. Um, I just say, I believe that we will win, and I believe in that freedom, and I believe it's coping, and I'm crying on a podcast, oh.

**Damon Williams:** That's what we're here for.

**Patrice Lawrence:** We're here for. Tears are okay, tears happen a lot in our spaces. It's a release. It's a release. So just, so grateful. Go follow UndocuBlack (u-n-d-o-c-u-b-l-a-c-k). Go give to our COVID fund, go show up at our protests and at our events, and fight with us. Um, we need to change the laws that exist around immigration in this system, um, and in this country, and we need access to the resources that will make us Whole. Thank you for having us.







**Jennicet Gutierrez:** Yes, thank you so much. Full of gratitude and appreciation for this conversation, to Allied Media Conference and everyone, you know, behind the scenes. The team that brought us together. Thank you so much. If people are interested, they can follow our work as, on all social media, is Familia TQLM, and follow hashtag end trans detention. Thank you very much.

**Daniel Kisslinger:** Beautiful, and we'll be back on the line continuing to talk with the people transforming and reshaping our world for the more equitable and creative.

**Damon Williams:** Much love to the people.

**Daniel Kisslinger:** Peace.

**Brenda Hernandez:** Wow, this has truly been an amazing conversation. I am so inspired and energized, and I hope you are, too. I want to thank Patrice, Jennicet, and AirGo for their work, and for taking the time to speak with us today. And I especially want to thank you for joining us and sharing your energy with us in the chat, and a special thank you and shout out to the incredible ASL cart and Spanish interpreters. Please give them a shout out in the chat as well. Our events will be recorded and made available in a few weeks. If you would like to let us know your thoughts on today's conversation, please go to [bit.ly/ampbloomfeedback](https://bit.ly/ampbloomfeedback) to let us know. We would love to hear from you. We have two more events coming up this season: May 27th, you can join us for Ancestral Ceremonies, and on June 10th, you can join us for Deep Work. To learn more about these events or to register please visit [bit.ly/ampbloom](https://bit.ly/ampbloom). Thanks again for coming. Be well and we'll see you soon.

