

AMP Seed Spring 2021 Season - Bloom

Event Transcript

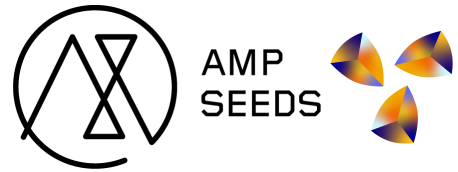
Youth Power

Thursday, April 29th, 2021

Brenda Hernandez: Thanks again for joining us today for our spring speaker series Bloom, and today's event Youth Power. My name's Brenda Hernandez and I'll be hosting you today. We're so grateful to share this virtual space with you and our guest, Adrienne Ayers, Nia Barnes, Melissa Regalado and Vanessa Sanchez. Please give them your kudos and love in the chat. They won't be able to see it but they'll definitely feel the vibrations. 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 AMP calls 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 with the legacies of your cities and acknowledge the land and communities where you reside. Earlier today, when we first started to have this conversation, we were talking about the importance of relationships between adults and young people as a way to support young people and their success in life and in everything. So I'm wondering if we can talk a little bit about your relationship with each other. The audience had an opportunity to read a little bit about your bios and who you are, but I'm curious to know, how did you all come to this work, come to be working together? Let's start with Adrienne and Nia.

Nia Barnes: So basically it was 2018, and I was 16 years old. And I was just really looking for something that was in the area that I could be a part of, that was about art and





techie and had other Black girls in it or like LGBT people, and that's when I was on Twitter just searching and I saw Afrofuture Youth. I basically just DM'd Adrienne and are they accepting any new members. And yeah, it's been like that ever since.

Adrienne Ayers: And I second, everything Nia has said. It started on Twitter really randomly. And I had no idea how she found us or found out about us because this was way before anybody else knew about what we were doing and we had just started. We were still in a fundraising phase when Nia DM'd us, so grateful that she found us and we are inseparable now and very close, so.

Brenda Hernandez: That's awesome. Twitter connections are real. How about you, Melissa and Vanessa?

Melissa Regalado: So I was, I think my freshman year and I was trying to find something to do after school. And at that point I was very curious in art 'cause I never really delved into more of an art form but I've heard of Yollocalli (www.yollocalli.org), I think not like an art exhibition they had like, you know it's just showcasing all their work and I really liked it. And I was really interested and other peers from my school were also there. So I was just interested and so I asked them, where could I sign up? Or if there was an ability to, and I was more drawn to the radio and like the street art program. And so I just asked Vanessa, like where do I sign up and all that.

Vanessa Sanchez: We signed her up. She's been with us, and now she's, Melissa is a senior. So we're happy that we're able to spend all those years with her and hopefully continue even through college, because she's doing great work with her podcasts with the radio show and even with our art too. So we're happy that she was able to join our community.

Brenda Hernandez: That's awesome. So our event today is called Youth Power and we have different definitions of what power can be in our relationship to it. You know, how do you all define power? How does Adrienne define power?

Adrienne Ayers: I define power as protecting the resources needed for the liberation of African lives globally. So it's about making sure that everything that we need



holistically is not compromised, it's not taken advantage of, is dispersed equitably and protected, from our land, our water, our mental health and holistic health resources as well that they're actually protected and not exploited for capitalists gain. And it's also on lives globally engaging in revolution and evolution simultaneously. So being a nation that actively works towards collective evolutionary power is in itself powerful for me.

Brenda Hernandez: That's beautiful. What about you Nia?

Nia Barnes: Well, I would define power as like, being like confident in your doing and having like influence on your community or like the communities that you're trying to like build up and, actually like doing the work like actually doing the work, like organizing and doing all of that type of stuff and getting people like involved and yeah, that's pretty much it. Basically everything that Adrienne said.

Brenda Hernandez: Inspiring others. Melissa, what about you?

Melissa Regalado: So I would define power as maybe the ability to influence a community, or persuade them into like the direction you're going to. I mean the most like blandest form, like just having specifically in mind like I think just being able to speak out against like a lot of the problems that my community has, is already like powerful in itself. So yeah.

Brenda Hernandez: Vanessa.

Vanessa Sanchez: Yeah. I will say know, I agree with everybody and you know I definitely believe that everybody has power and it's about how you use that power. Are you going to use it for the good of the community or for your own benefits? And so it's really about helping those who are doing it for the good of the community, to help maintain them and support that to grow and influence others into continuing to do good for that community.

Brenda Hernandez: So we have, you know, inspiration, we have resource management, right? We have like calls to action. How does Yollocalli use that power in the work that you all do with young people?



Vanessa Sanchez: Yeah, for Yollo, it's really about the adults, you know, seeing young people as peers, as collaborators, as equals, and giving that space for young people too because oftentimes the young people don't recognize that they have power because they'd been in the space where power was always taken away from them, or power was the adult having power over them. And so Yollocalli it's like, here's this other great space we're gonna give you some skills, maybe technical skills, art skills, maybe some great equipment, and we're gonna see what you can make and how are you going to use your power, either for the community, for your peers, for your family and yeah, and then even paying them for doing this work. So really it's about supporting them as if you know, because they are leaders in the community and they need to be recognized as that, and that they are powerful and that they can make change.

Brenda Hernandez: Awesome. Adrienne how about you for Afrofuture Youth. How does Afrofuture Youth share that power with the town people?

Adrienne Ayers: So everything that was just said is exactly what I agree with as well. And I feel like, that we also do with Afrofuture Youth. It's about making sure that we understand that like, yes you know, I am a little bit older than y'all but we are on the same level, we are both humans experiencing these things and approaching these things. And it's about making sure that they have the space and the tools, and are comfortable enough to lead, comfortable enough to trust. You know, it's also for us like making sure that the relationships are built and that they're tight and solidified and helping them, and guiding them towards seeing themselves in the future that they want, but not just seeing it but truly believing in it, like truly believing that it's possible. And so I think that's part of what we do as well. And making sure that they have an understanding and an analysis of what's necessary, like an analysis add it to what they already understand of what's going on and how do we come together and all of our power to just make one big light together to create what it is we wanna see.

Brenda Hernandez: That's beautiful. One big light, like a rainbow. We're listening to you, I'm listening to you. And I'm like, yes, yes. Everything. Yes. Like snaps. And I'm sure people that are watching are also nodding their heads along, but when it comes down to it, doing that kind of work is hard, right? You know, if we think about what's going on



with like public school systems, you know youth are not having those kinds of experiences everywhere. So I'm curious, how do you all do this work? How do you all experience it? And maybe we'll start with Melissa and Nia and how they're experiencing this kind of shared power at their organizations. Let's see, Melissa.

Melissa Regalado: I didn't quite get it. Is it just like my experience in the organization?

Brenda Hernandez: Yeah. You know, Adrienne and Vanessa were talking about how these places share the power with young people and help you sharpen your skills and realize the things that you're able to do. What has that been like for you? How are you learning about your own power in these kinds of spaces?

Melissa Regalado: Okay. Yeah. I'm sorry, my bad. But basically I think I've gained a better ability to communicate. And just to make sure, like, I'm not really that like scared per se about like speaking out on stuff. And definitely like this organization has given me more of a platform to be able to like speak out on things that I kind of see every day and not necessarily like people aren't paying attention to it or are ignoring it, and you know so I appreciate having the ability to not speak out on things and having like, I guess like-minded people around me who also see those problems and agree on the same stuff, I guess.

Brenda Hernandez: Yeah. What about you, Nia? What are you experiencing?

Nia Barnes: I feel like I'm experiencing it the same way because like we basically we talk about everything from like political stuff to like just like stuff like in general. And it's like, it actually like gives you a space to like, 'cause of me personally this is my first time having like a relationship with an adult where I actually feel like I can be myself and I'm not seeing as like inferior or something because I'm younger, like I don't know anything. So I think that's also what I really like about it because like we're acting as like equals and peers instead of like, "Oh, I've been here longer, you don't know anything," blah, blah blah. So, yeah.

Brenda Hernandez: You know, I participated in programs like yours when I was a young person, and I feel like often times after leaving a space like that you see people outside



of those spaces a little differently. Like you see other adults and you're like, huh? Like, why aren't you acting like the people I know over here, or you see your parents and you're like, huh? Like you were a teenager too. Like, why are you like treating me differently? I'm curious to know what kind of relationships you all had with other adults, but as you do this kind of work you know, Vanessa and Adrienne were young before, what relationships that you have with adults and what led you to do this work?

Adrienne Ayers: Who would you like to go first?

Brenda Hernandez: Yeah, go first Adrienne if you'd like.

Adrienne Ayers: Okay. Well, I did have support from adults when I was in high school. I once at Cass Technical High School which was near the downtown area in Detroit and so wasn't far. Very aware there was a lot of youth programming happening at an organization, formerly known as Youthville. It's no longer around, and it allowed me to explore journalism. It allowed me, that was my first love was journalism and working with camera and film. Al Taylor who was a part of Youthville—he started the peace project also and I got involved in that—was a really big support for me. I really only had, I can only name like, that's the first adult and kind of like the only adult that comes to mind, it wasn't much. And it just gave me a space school in order to express myself, which was better than nothing. Honestly, I wouldn't say that it was like a super tight relationship or I really got to explore and grow in other ways like politically or spiritually which I think could have been a benefit, but I would say it was still helpful but I wish I would've had something even more like what I'm seeing now with Yollocalli, what other groups are doing even outside of AFY. Because it can go beyond even what I've experienced here. So I wish I would have been able to tap more into some of my power and get a better understanding of who I was as it related to the society that I lived in.

Brenda Hernandez: Yeah. Vanessa?

Vanessa Sanchez: For me, I have an older sister and I really feel like she introduced me to what it means to be in this intergenerational space where everybody sees each other. And I went to a high school that also provided me with freedom too... There was a club but the adults were never in the room. They trusted us to run the club. They



trusted us to hold the money for the club. So again, it was a lot of this trust between a young person and an adult. And when I went to Yollocalli some of my sister's friends who I grew up with were working at Yollocalli. So again, there was like this cycle of trust, like, wow like I'm in a space where even more adults are creating art and creating community work with each other as peers and collaborators. So as I continued in Yollocalli it was just this historical knowledge, this way of like just realizing that this is the way it should be, right? Youth and adults, you know youth is this strange concept but it's also a time you're developing but adults need to be there for youth in the same way that they're there for other adults.

Brenda Hernandez: You mentioned trust. And I feel like often times when we hear of violence against youth, it's because the people that are enacting that violence don't trust young people. So why do you think that is? Why do you think people are not trusting of young people even though we all have been young and we all know what it's like, right? Why is there still that disconnect when we grow up and then it's like, "Oh no, you're young," like there must be something going on. I'm curious to learn what Nia and Melissa think about, why not all the adults in the world are acting in the way that the adults are for Afrofuture Youth and Yollocalli act.

Nia Barnes: I think it's because they're stuck in their ways. Like they're still like going by these ideas that do not apply to our generation anymore. Like they're not acting like, I feel like, oh well it was like this when I was growing up so it's gonna be like this for you also. And then people already have like this, kind of, this like set ideal about young people to where like, oh, they think like we're mischievous or we are gonna make a lot of mistakes, and it's really weird because at some point you were our age, too. So yeah, I think the biggest issue is just not them not adapting to like the fact that the world is changing and them just being really stuck in their ways.

Brenda Hernandez: Yeah, Melissa.

Melissa Regalado: So I also agree with her, but also I would just say I think adults already have this interpretation that they know more than, I guess a child or not a child but even whatever, someone younger than them. I don't know what's up with adults with that because I don't wanna say it's a power dynamic but I guess it might be like a



power dynamic in place where I don't know, maybe an adult feels inferior in some way and they wanna gain, I guess some type of power over like someone young. So being able to control them is something that you might find like pleasure in. But yeah, I just don't understand why adults don't, I guess trust teenagers enough. And I think that should be something that should be like changing, you know?

Brenda Hernandez: Yeah. Yeah. Vanessa, why do you think other young adults that you work with or how do you help adults trust young people?

Vanessa Sanchez: That is really hard work to do. And I think for me, I think that adults who don't work with young people all the time don't really have that opportunity to build a strong relationship. Or, that adult maybe is dealing with their own trauma from their own past when they were growing up as a young person and so then they project that on how they're building these relationships with young people in their own lives. So it's really hard, and just like Mia said, it's a generational thing. I'm going to be 39. I think that us people who are working with young people grew up with adults who trusted us, and now we are helping young people grow up with other adults trusting them. And then I imagine Nia and Melissa will also build relationships with young people where they are trusting them too. So, you know, just like anything in the past that's wrong there's really great people out here who are working hard and trying to, you know, destroy those old ways of thinking and really grow into being, again this community who's all working together, like Adrian said to create this great light in our community.

Brenda Hernandez: Yeah. You sound very hopeful. That's awesome. Adrienne, do you share that hope? How do you deal with the adults that are distrusting and are kind of stuck in their ways?

Adrienne Ayers: Well, I do my best to model how I personally work with the young people in my life if I am around other adults, I definitely just try to lead by example through the restorative conversations that I'm having, how I'm not yelling, how I'm just like approaching these things calmly. Like outside of Afrofuture Youth, I'm a school teacher by day, and so I'm around a lot of adults and there's always a lot of power issues, a lot of what was shared about some adults feeling inferior. You know, I'm not gonna let this elementary student tell me they're too tired or not in the mood to do this



thing I have planned for them, and it's just like... you have feelings too, don't you? They have feelings as well. And so let's check in it's very simple things I think we can do but I think we are also repeating the things that we are used to having endured, through bowing into like participating in state run educational systems and things like that, where it's just like, what I say and that's the final say. And as a young person, even though it hurts you you're taught that that's the right way to go about things, with this adult modeling that to you and I think it gets easily repeated, but I just do my business model when I'm around other adults, and I share hourly share on social media, just my thought on how we engage with young people.

Brenda Hernandez: Yeah. I mean, really you're talking about like generational trauma and breaking those cycles especially like in public schools or, you know in spaces where adults are trying to maintain authority and control of like the young people, like there is that trauma and someone has to make the first move and break that cycle which isn't always easy. So kind of related, but shifting gears a little bit you know, one of the ways in movements people are engaging others in their work and helping them like break those cycles is to like humanize, you know the folks that we're doing work for to humanize the movement leaders, to humanize the movement with like stories and you know really great documentation and sharing that just a good... I mean, not just the bad, but also the good, you know at Allied Media Projects, we define media as the ways in which we communicate with the world. And so I'm wondering, how does Yollocalli and Afrofuture Youth communicate and humanize, you know young people in the work that they're doing, Vanessa?

Vanessa Sanchez: Yeah. I think for me, it's about giving them again the power, giving them the space to present their work, and have the adults stepping back and allowing them to speak about their work or lead a project, or take over a whole museum at night and allow all their friends to come party at the museum with them. So, yeah, again, I think it's really about the young people being focused as the leaders of Yollocalli and the adults are there as the mentors. But if we present that, then hopefully we're changing other adults' perspectives about how, even though I shouldn't say even though, but people see us as the fun goofy weird org, but you know, it's really the young people who are leading it. It's their culture, it's their interests, and so it's respecting what they're creating.



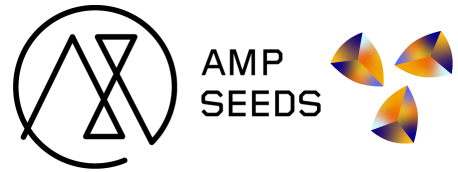
Brenda Hernandez: Yeah. Adrienne.

Adrienne Ayers: Yes. So I believe the ways that we communicate with the world does also look like letting our young people lead, letting them take the reins and create projects as often as we can. So in Afrofuture Youth, what we do is we create long-term projects that reflect a black futurist world centered around revolution that they want to see. But before the projects like, so they go through a curriculum one part healing modalities, one part political analysis and then the last part politicalization, but when they're done with that then these long-term projects come about. We've been lucky enough to not have them wait until the end of this three months of going through this curriculum to where we can communicate projects ahead of time through certain things like the Afrofuture Youth, Onik Safe Space Mix. So Nia, did you wanna talk about how like what we just did with that?

Nia Barnes: Yeah, so basically our DJ and producer AK 640 she basically all—like everybody who's in the youth program—we like sent her songs that she winded up turning into a mix and it's like on SoundCloud and it's really good. And it was basically just like songs we sent. Some songs I sent were like by Ari Lennox, Diana Gordy, Rico Nasty and stuff like that. And it was just like a really long like, well not long but it's like maybe like 23 to 25 minutes of just songs that we sent her that she mixed for us. And she, I think put like frequency waves on the sound on the playlist, well not the playlist, but the mix so like the people who are actually listening to it, like they can like really enjoy it and like, you know feel the vibes. So yeah, it was really good. And we're gonna be doing that like every month, like once a month. So, yeah.

Adrienne Ayers: And then the purpose of the first mix was just to allow people a chance to... Black people specifically in the diaspora, a chance for them to use music as an escape to another realm to heal. And through that, once you've finished saying, okay like I'm ready to get back and I'm ready to revolutionize now. So the theme of that first mix was healing. What does a healed future sound like to us? And then like Mia said, everybody puts together their songs with a futuristic feel.





Brenda Hernandez: That's awesome. I'm sure people watching are gonna be like where is the link? Send it to me now, you know, if you share us some information, we'll be sure to share it with the people that registered at a later time if not incident, what's your SoundCloud name? So people can follow up.

Adrienne Ayers: It's Afrofuture Youth SoundCloud and it'll be back in our bio, on Afrofuture Youth fan on Instagram later today. So if you follow Afrofuture Youth on Instagram, the link will be in our bio later today again.

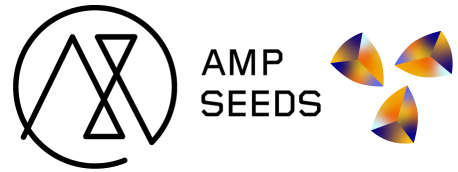
(<https://soundcloud.com/adrienne-ayers-82003473/afrofuture-youth-sonic-safe-space-001>)

Brenda Hernandez: That's great. Thank you. So Nia was talking about this like DJ star and you know, young people curating things. What kind of media is Yollocalli doing? Melissa are you working on anything in particular?

Melissa Regalado: Right now we're working more on like music production. I mean, I'm hoping we could maybe tackle more like I guess more serious issues. We just did one about just police brutality and just because you know someone was murdered by police in our community, like a 13 year old boy, and obviously we were very like hurt by it. It's something that's very like, I think traumatizing obviously for the family but just being like someone and part of the community, it's a dark reality that maybe like a lot of people face. And I appreciate the fact that like a lot of people who were in the radio program, like who basically we got together and decided to either interview or collecting, just more of like I guess talk about more experiences of police brutality and just how basically how corrupt our system is in general. I'm also working on my podcast, which is called Cruel Public Schooling.

(<https://soundcloud.com/melissa-regal/sets/cruel-public-schooling-by>) And the purpose of it is because brown and black students make up the majority of the CPS here in Chicago, and they're disproportionately like always... they always suffer. And so that was the aim of it. And specifically, you know, I wanna target schools that are like, who served like black and brown youth, I guess, and it's made also to cover issues with teachers, parents and students. And I've done, I think, a whole range of topics. I've done one about cops in schools and just how people are kind of coping with remote learning either by teachers, parents, or students. So, yeah.





Brenda Hernandez: That's awesome. Actually, I think we have a clip of the intro to your Cruel Public Schooling Podcast. Can we get a listen?

Clip from podcast: [Announcer] Welcome, we are presenting another episode of CPS, Cruel Public Schooling. It is the middle ground between unrest and discipline between injustice and corruption. And it lies between the pit of a student's fears and the summit of their knowledge. This is the dimension of education. It is an area which we call cruel public schooling. A dimension that intends to scrutinize the CPS system through its core from a student's eyes.

Brenda Hernandez: Hearing the introduction to your podcast and you describing it, you know, you're talking about violence against black and brown youth and the ways in which like systems are oppressing, you know not just like their livelihoods, but their education. And, you know, when Nia was talking about like DJing and making like communal playlists and getting, you know a DJ to put them together and share them out, you know there's like two very stark realities, right? I think the writer Ijeoma Oluo recently talked about how black and brown kids never get to like F up, right? They never get to like, be like, rebellious completely. I think, you know, part of her tweet was saying they never get to be wild. They never get to be kids; to do so can land them in jail or in the morgue. So what does it do to us collectively as people to never get to fully participate in like that kind of joy? I'm wanting to hear from you all, how do you all balance the realities of like the things that young people are facing but also still find moments to celebrate and laugh together and dance and joy and have that joyous as a community. Adrienne, can you share a little bit about that?

Adrienne Ayers: Sure. I think this brings me to... I'm just paraphrasing Dr. Joy James here, who is an academic abolitionist and she spoke about a lot of times we're so focused on these black futurist worlds that we kind of use them like futurism as an escapism, without being able to sit in and acknowledge the nightmares that exist. It's about being able to find a balance between dreams and nightmares. We need to be able to envision the world that we'd want to see, but we have to understand that if we are not actually organizing around the reality of what is, then we will not be able to see that world and the way we might get a taste of it. We might get a snippet of it. But I think it's



easy for me to balance what is happening right now with what I want to see through black futurism and African liberation, because I'm organizing and I am encouraging Afrofuture Youth participants to organize also, and not just through the lens of anti-capitalism but through the lens of socialism, being able to name where we're going is important and not just what we no longer wanna see, we don't want realism anymore. And so now we're discussing: what do we wanna see instead, and for us, we're leaning into socialism and learning about it and putting that into practice, but specifically through political education and studying and developing. And I think for me now and I'm just gonna end with this, it's just important to study, it's important to do the analysis, because if you don't understand the "how", and the inner workings of how we got here, it will be repeated. And so now we're like, okay, like how do we study together, and then how we're going to bring about evolution which to me is facing this nightmare as revolution, which is coming in future.

Brenda Hernandez: Vanessa.

Vanessa Sanchez: For me, at Yollocalli that we're giving young people the space to express themselves on media to, you know to reflect on what's happening within their communities and to question why they're happening, and just like agents have to re-imagine our communities and be able to speak to others in power about the changes that we want. And I think it's also really important that we're telling our own stories which is why I love that Yollocalli does radio and audio production, because it's telling the stories of our communities from the young people experiencing it, from the families experiencing it, experiencing everything happening. I also appreciate all the artwork being created at Yollocalli because again, for me, art is political. It's a capturing of a moment in time that the artist is experiencing. And so again, giving that young person that space to tell their story is really important because without it someone else will tell our story. And so we need to be able to share with others even if it doesn't get noticed now, it will get noticed later. And yeah, I just think it's really important for us to provide that space to not only heal, but again also to create this moment, this capturing of history, this capturing of how we're feeling, what we're experiencing and how we want to reimagine our futures together.



Brenda Hernandez: Melissa and Nia, you know, we hear Adrienne and Vanessa talking about how they envisioned this future and the work that they do to ensure that young people like yourselves have a better future. How do you envision your own future and that of like your friends and other young people? When you hear them talk about the future, what does that look like for you? Melissa, or Nia go ahead.

Nia Barnes: I guess for me, it just looks like us doing what we want and being like aware of certain things that like we'll have to face in society I guess, or whatever, but also giving us the freedom to like, just be trauma free sometimes because like you don't really see black and brown youth being able to like have trauma free experiences, like, especially in the media, like all these movies I see about black and brown youth, it's always something has to happen, it can never be anything like normal. Like you can't just ever have like a normal like be a regular teenager. And so I think that's what I see, like just us being ourselves and, you know like doing the things that we enjoy and, you know just doing what we want and like being free.

Brenda Hernandez: Melissa.

Melissa Regalado: Yeah. So I guess for me, or at least how I'm growing up, just having like this very like not inconveniences 'cause they're more impactful than that, but having these things that could be already solved like already, you know, non-existent so for example, like I guess for my experience, like a lot of police officers are in schools, I would wish for like I guess other people who are younger than me to have a safer environment in schools, or just having people... Having an environment where it's like a subject to like be whoever you are and just become more comfortable in your community. And those are like one of the issues I see and that's what I hope to see in the future. Just, you know, just inconvenience in general either by not experiences I go good education, or just being around violent neighborhoods in itself, and it's not necessarily like just the control, it's a fault of like, you know our local government that is the place like, you know Chicago is really segregated and they purposely displaced like money just tax revenue and all that, it just impacts a community in itself and that's what I kind of hope to see in a future where there's more equity across, you know urban areas just because it's something that's, you know very inconvenient for people, and it's



just not a good environment to grow up. And when you're experiencing inequity and you see other people having, I think a better shot at life than you.

Brenda Hernandez: We've had a couple of questions come in from the people watching and I'd like to sort of go in that direction. So we have enough time to address some of them. There is was a question from a person in the English chat who is wondering what Adrian and Vanessa have learned from Nia and Melissa you know. We've talked about sort of Afrofuture Youth and the work it does to engage young people, but I'm sure you have learned some things from them as well. So Vanessa, what have you learned from working with young people and from Melissa herself?

Vanessa Sanchez: From Melissa I've learned, I would say bravery I think when she came out with Cruel Public Schooling I was so just ecstatic because, you know, she wanted to put this podcast out on her own. Like we didn't, this wasn't like a part of the radio show or anything, she was like, I wanna do this. And so our amazing instructors Stephanie helped there along the way to start producing this. And, you know, as a student of CPS, Chicago Public Schools it takes a lot to stand up to this giant system that serving thousands of students. And so I'm just like... Again I think she's brave that she's just putting it out there and telling everybody who's either working in CPS or has a student there, I'm sorry a son or daughter there, or is a student there, that here's a space. You can talk about the issues that you're feeling about you know, this system. And then from other young people, again, I'm an optimist, but like they're the ones that are really in need because you know, most of the adults that I interact with, it's just a lot of like what ifs or just like disbelief in being able to change something. And with young people it's all about action. It's like, no, we need to change this, and I appreciate that because I can get frustrated being in a room with adults who constantly make excuses or constantly try to defend themselves for inactions.

Adrienne Ayers: One minute. Okay. Well, I'll let you go in like a second. I'll answer this question and then you wanna go handle what you need to do.

Nia Barnes: Yeah.

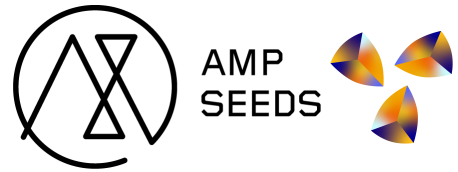


Adrienne Ayers: Okay. That's fine. What I've learned from Nia. Nia, to me it's like living transformation right in front of me. She's like a butterfly just can't stay in this constant state of metamorphosis happening right before my eyes, and I'm so honored to be able to see it. It's a reminder to me to continue learning, and to not be afraid to take to the things that I really wanna do. There's nothing that you don't take advantage of that comes your way. Like anything that like someone sends me like, oh this will be cool for Nia. Like, see if she wants to do it. Like you should send this to Nia. Or I find something she takes advantage of everything to at least like she started so much, she maintained so much. I'm just like, you're just reminding me that not to be afraid to dive in and to speak up for myself. Nia expresses herself really well, and that reminds me to never lose my voice and that I have my voice for a reason. And as far as from other youth just, they're all reminding me of the power of community. Sometimes I get shot when they all show up for program dang near every Friday, I'm like, oh, y'all are still here? Y'all still want to do the show? Like if I don't know, like I think this stuff is cool. I'm like, yo sometimes it surprises me when they still show up, and it just reminds me of the power of community. And so just keep going because someone's gonna see your light and we see each other's light and it's really nice.

Brenda Hernandez: That's awesome. I mean, we're here because we believe in young people and we know that you're doing great things and you all just shared about how you've learned so much from them. We actually have somebody that is asking, you know what have the young people learn from themselves as a part of like doing this work with you all. Melissa what have you learned about yourself as you do this kind of activity?

Melissa Regalado: I just feel not necessarily about myself but I guess to answer this question more better I guess I would say that don't underestimate a lot of, I guess the power one has in itself. Just like having the ability, you know to speak out on stuff is already powerful in itself. And I guess just knowing that not everything is impossible and you know there's ways to navigate through challenges like that. And I guess another thing would be that... I guess building community and itself, and just the importance on speaking out about a lot of stuff that is happening, you know more of like social justice issues are important in any type of way. And I guess it's like something that everyone should be talking about because it will impact you. And it's





something that is, I guess shouldn't be selfish. It should be something that is looked upon as more communal and more like, I guess selfless. So, yeah.

Nia Barnes: I agree. Like I being in Afrofuture Youth it's taught me like what I'm capable of and like the things that like I can take every and stuff like that. And I also agree with like the social issue thing. Like they're really important. And it's funny because like a lot of young people, like they don't really care about these things. Like just like, even like a lot of black and brown youth like they don't care about what's going on in the world until it specifically impacts them, and I don't think we should have that mindset. And it's really annoying because it's 2021 like educate yourself on these things, like educate yourself on the things that impact you and that impact other marginalized groups so you can be aware. Don't only keep the issue if it... Just because it doesn't like impact you personally like don't just like brush it to the side or try to like put it up under the rug or something. But yes, definitely taught me like how creative we can be like as young people and the things that we can like come up with, and it's really cool.

Brenda Hernandez: That's great. Actually, there's a person asking you now, you're talking about getting other young people to get involved and to learn more and to become more engaged. Have you all found yourselves making space for those kinds of conversation with your friends or people at school, or other young people that you know about? What is that like to learn something like this and then take it out?

Nia Barnes: I would definitely say like me and like my friends 'cause I have like a lot of like internet friends. We definitely have like conversations about things like misogyny and racism, and like transphobia and homophobia. And I just, like, I make sure that my friends are like aware of these things because I don't wanna like associate myself with anyone who's not aware of them or they don't care about them, or they're not like open to learning about them, but really, I guess, like I would say like hold conversations with your friends like go on social media because it's literally all over social media. Like it's kind of impossible to miss, like read books, study the issue, like do research, take a class or something like don't limit yourself. Like there's like you have resources, all the stuff. So yeah. Take advantage of them, period.

Brenda Hernandez: Yeah. Get with it. Melissa. How about yourself?



Melissa Regalado: Well, in my experience I guess the school I attend my teachers are, I guess more open-minded than other teachers I've experienced in the past. So I guess it's pretty, it's an easier space to talk about like more issues like that. But I've seen like my friends from like other schools and they have teachers that I'm like, they're allowed to say that? And I think it's just important to create discussion but obviously you don't wanna hear stuff that is very like hurtful to someone. So I guess a way it is like to kind of persuade them and influence them, like, you know this is not the right path and you're thinking of this in a very like wrong perspective. And I guess I would put an example, like, you know the death of the 13 year old boy in my community it was just alarming just seeing a lot of my classmates, I guess either justifying the things that this police officer did and then just other, I guess the other half, I guess seeing my perspective in it. And also I guess the majority of it, which is like it's obviously something unfair and shouldn't have happened. And I mean, sooner or later, like the teachers really I don't think they expected these types of answers but it's just, I was just creating this space where you can actually discuss about these issues. Obviously there's gonna be people that say outrageous things, but I think in a way, like for you to move on further, you have to tackle these issues at hand and persuade and convince them that you know, it's not the correct way of doing things.

Brenda Hernandez: Somebody is asking, you know, what can adults do better as they continue to do this work and helping young people find the autonomy? How are you hoping to grow in the work that you're doing with young people? Let's start with Adrienne.

Adrienne Ayers: What was the first part of the question? Or the first question, it sounded like two questions.

Brenda Hernandez: What can we do better? You all are obviously, you know folks are asking for advice on how they can do better. And I'm sure as an adult you're also thinking about the work that you're doing and what you see next for your future. And so, yeah, I think there are two questions there. Let's start with the first one, like what folks can do better.

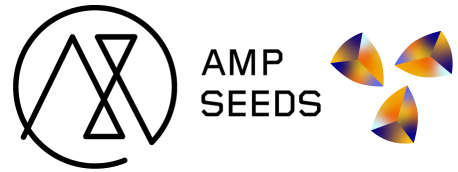


Adrienne Ayers: So I think adults can do better. Generally speaking if you're an adult who doesn't work directly with youth, just generally speaking, thinking about the issues that are impacting us as a society, like as a whole. And then imagine those issues impacting our young people because they're not being listened to, like their autonomy is not being respected. So we're dealing with the same issues as our youth but they feel more impacted by it. And so to me, the best way to support them is to directly start as many people as possible to organize around these issues specifically. I'm always like really big on calling people because if we don't want these... If we want to see these issues be dismantled. If we want to create revolution, there is no revolution without organizing, there's never been a revolution without organizing. And so that's very important to understand: what does that mean? And it doesn't have to mean you're a part of a formal organization, but if we really care about our young people then that means you care about protecting the future that they're going to be here to see longer than we will. You know, so it's about, how do I directly get involved in organizing around these issues even if it's not a part of a formal organization? You can organize in your hood with just you and two more people. You know, it only takes just a few. And with that being said, you cannot dismantle the issues that are directly impacting them you know, without them. So let them lead. And also develop an analysis is one thing. But if you do not have the analysis in the study with it you're not gonna understand how to not keep that harm, though I think those are very important things that have to happen. You know, we say we care about our people but if you are not involved in your people's struggle what does that care really mean?

Brenda Hernandez: Yeah. Vanessa, same question.

Vanessa Sanchez: Yeah. I think for me it's not again just listening to young people, it's about understanding where they're coming from, understanding why they want change and then acting on that change. Especially if that adult has a power to make change and to make it quickly if they're demanding it, and not making excuses again, not defending themselves because this is just how we do it and this is the way it's done and it's gonna take time. Like, no, they are tired of hearing that. I think a lot of us are tired of hearing that and we wanna see action. And I think another thing is some people... it may sound rude, some people need to go, some people just need to retire, find a new career. I don't know, but they need to go and then make room for new generations to come up and





take space in these positions of power and positions of change. And yeah, I feel that way a lot with different organizations and government. I mean, again there's these new generation who really wanna make change and see how community can be run differently. And I think it's great when a young leader steps up and is able to be older man or, you know, work in city council, things like that. I get excited about that because again, I know we can't change everything with the same tools that we're working with, but if we could get some new people in there to use these tools and maybe like bring in different tools or break the tools and make new tools, that's all we need. So if you're willing to listen or make change, bless you, that's what we need. But if you're that ready to listen, it might be time to go.

Adrienne Ayers: My video was glitchy, but I was over here snapping for you. My video is glitchy, but these were snaps, okay?

Vanessa Sanchez: Thank you.

Brenda Hernandez: Melissa, how do you think people can do better?

Melissa Regalado: I guess the obvious thing would be like educate yourself, but some people find that hard. So I guess it would be, I guess taking baby steps in that way, like Nia said like, you know, go through social media it's literally there just ask other people, start conversations about it. And obviously if it's something you're deeply interested in like find out more about it. I mean, historically, like if we're looking through just movements of socialism and just all these like social justice issues that have been happening for like thousands, hundreds of years you can look back there's a lot of stuff's still maintain relevancy even like now, they form another different ways and, you know they present themselves differently, but I would say like, educate yourself, you know find out about social media, make sure you're not looking through like a very biased source that obviously is trying to spread their own propaganda. But yeah, I would say like, take baby steps on it. If you're interested in some topics maybe look like, you know, slowly through it. And then, you know, if you gain more insurance gaining more interest on it. And yeah, I guess that's the only way we can grow. I guess as a community is just being able to talk more about these conversations and openness to learn more about different things that might affect us.



Brenda Hernandez: Yeah. Nia, same question. How do you think people should do better? It's your chance to let them know let the world know what they need to do.

Nia Barnes: So, because I'm like super late for therapy I'll make this really short. So just listen, like basically what I was telling Adrienne last night we were going over the questions. I will just say listening, stop thinking because you're an adult you know everything because it's not, that's not how it works. Like, yeah, you've been here longer than me, but we are in two different generations. Natural selection, adapt to the culture please. It's not 1984 anymore. Just adapt to the culture. Listen to teenagers when we say stuff, when we talk about mental health, when we talk about social issues, because like, for example our generation is very outspoken on mental health like depression and like ADHD, anxiety, schizophrenia, and sometimes adults are like, oh, you're making excuses. You're always making things up. You want something to be wrong with you. No, listen, basically everything that Melissa said, like listen, and please like, let go of like the power dynamic and the need to have authority and control over somebody you're older than.

Adrienne Ayers: Because like, how are we supposed to be liberated with this hierarchy?

Nia Barnes: Exactly.

Adrienne Ayers: We need to be like this.

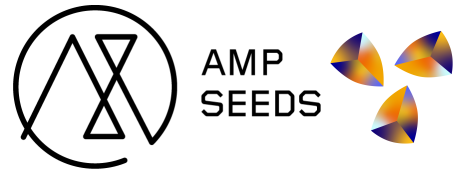
Nia Barnes: Adapt to the culture and like, listen and stop seeing like younger people as like we're inferior or something, because like you were younger at one point too, so you can learn a lot from young people and a lot from adults, period.

Adrienne Ayers: Thank you Nia.

Nia Barnes: You're welcome. I kind of have to go, but this was really nice.

Brenda Hernandez: We have taken up some of your time. And I think it's been great to get reminded about the magic and the power of young people but also just the magic





and the power of listening to young people. Nia and Melissa haven't, you know are where they're at now and have their relationships with you all now because it's obvious you have listened and you have, you know, put them at the same place that you are as the adults in the room, whatever that means now. I think this has been a really great conversation. Amidst the technical difficulties, you know I'm really inspired and energized and I want to thank y'all Adrienne, Nia, Melissa and Vanessa for your work, and for taking the time to speak with us today. I wanna thank the audience for bearing with us. And special thank you to our incredible interpreters that are doing ASL and the live closed captioning, and live Spanish translation please give them a shout out. We're so grateful that you're here with us and making these events as accessible as possible. If you were not able to catch all of today's event don't worry we're recording it and we'll make it available as soon as we can on this YouTube page. If you like to share your thoughts with us, you know, please go to bit.ly/AMPBloomFeedback we would love to hear from you. If you want to stay connected with Yollocalli Arts Reach and Afrofuture Youth please make sure to follow them, and listen to their DJ sets and their podcasts that are produced and made by young people. We have three more events coming up. We have Undocumented and Unafraid, May 13th, Ancestral Ceremonies May 27th, and closing off with Deep Work June 10th. So please be sure to register so you can attend and join us in conversation. In celebration of the arrival of spring and to honor all the workers who have fought for better lives for themselves and their communities, we wanna wish everyone a happy May Day. If you'd like to learn more about May Day please visit Maydayspace.org to get to know a little bit about the history of this special holiday. Again, thank you so much for being with us here today. Thank you to our guest. We'll be back soon. Bye.

