

Virtual Love. Virtual Healing.

Episode Transcript

Better Futures: Visioning in a Time of Crisis

Thursday, June 11, 2020 from 4-5pm ET

Nandi Comer: Hello, and welcome to the Allied Media Projects, virtual speaker series- Virtual Love Virtual Healing. Thank you so much for coming and joining us today. And we are really, really excited because today's session we'll be talking about we'll be talking a little with Walidah Imarisha. Today's title of today's session is Better futures, Better visioning. And we're going to be looking at visionary organizing visionary fiction, and how we can use our imaginations to really dream, dream big, and dream outside of the limits of what we've been, we thought can be possible.

So before I get started, there's just a little bit of some kind of housekeeping in a sense. So and are those that are joining us on zoom, we are really happy for the response that we had, we had 500 people registered for this session. And that that was actually our limit. And so we were really excited to be able to open this up on YouTube Live. So if there are people that you know, that are still trying to get on and listen and pay and participate, we decided to broadcast this on our YouTube Live channel, and they can go to Allied Media channel also will have that posted if anyone wants to share that out. The other thing is that this is a participatory event.

So as we start to do our activities, as we start to do our shout outs as we start to do and engage everyone, we really want y'all that are tuned in on zoom to respond to us. So you can use the comments section, the chat section to give your kind of responses. If you hear something that you really support, go ahead and say yes, I love that. You can put a checkmark a plus mark and emoji, whatever, because we really want to see that love happening. And then if you have any questions for us, we really want you to use



the q&a tool. So on the bottom of your screen, you'll see chat, and you'll see q&a, please go ahead and use both of those to let us know that you're here. You see us and then you have questions.

All right. So the next thing that I have I want to do is I just want to make sure that we recognize the space that we're in. Here at Allied Media Projects, we make sure that we always recognize our spaces. So actually, before I do that one last housekeeping, we are doing closed captioning, it is a dictation platform through Otter AI. The link is also being provided in the chat by our folks that are working behind the scenes. So if you need that, go ahead and click on that link. So you can make sure that you can follow along via text. All right. So now, here at Allied Media Projects, we always begin all of our events by acknowledging and uplifting the history of Detroit, Detroit on Anishinaabe and other indigenous people, it's the, it sits on the Anishinabe and land of other indigenous people. It is the largest majority black city in the nation with a long legacy of African diasporic global contributions, which was once it was also once a stop on the Underground Railroad known by its code name, Midnight. Detroit is also the US city with the largest concentration of Arab Americans. It's a border city with a historic growing Latinx community and a legacy of Asian American communities and movements.

So here at Allied Media Projects, we are, our organization is based in Detroit and our mission is to cultivate media for liberation. And so that's one of the things that we're here for today. We believe in that our liberation is an ongoing process of personal and collective and systematic transformation. We work with people and projects rooted in Detroit and all over the world. And we have we do that to three programs, the Allied Media Conference, which a lot of people are familiar with our Sponsor Project program, which really engages to make radical practice, we'll make the radical practical by doing Fiscal Sponsorship. And then the program that brings today's session to you the Speaker's Bureau where we assist speakers in distributing models of liberation through their media base organizing.

So enough talk, I just want to move on to our guest are really excited to have Walidah Imarisha here. Um, I mean, I feel like you don't need an introduction. I'm just gonna say this. Um, I've been working with Walidah for a little while now, and she is definitely one



of the most like imaginative writers and really has a broad span that works within like visionary organizing visionary fiction, but also does youth work to in terms of in the carceral system is dedicated to actually liberation work. We're not talking about someone who just says that they move, but they also she's also doing the work. So I'm really excited to have you here. Welcome.

Walidah Imarisha: Thank you, Nandi. Aaaw, that's such a great introduction.

Nandi: Um, I feel like it doesn't nearly describe the many, many accomplishments that you have. But I want to open it up, because I think we are all here to discuss this idea of what does it mean to do visionary fiction? I think a lot of people think of futurist work or sci fi work, but we are specifically thinking about visionary fiction. So can you frame that for us? Can you like give us a good framework for understanding what do we talk about talking about this research?

Walidah: Absolutely. And I mean, first, I just want to thank Nandi and Scheherazade and everyone at the Allied Media Project as well as especially that the Allied Media Speakers Bureau as someone who is trying to do this work and be a public figure in a way that's accountable and grassroots. And that really embodies principles of organizing, trying to create spaces to not just, you know, make that money really move movements forward, it's been so beautiful, being able to, to dream and build with Allied Media.

And you know, the AMC the Allied Media Conference, I hope everyone knows about it, I hope you're planning on going it is being held this year, it is virtual, it is an incredible space. To me, it is one of those moments where we get to pull the futures we want into the present. And I'm sure it'll be different virtually, but I'm sure that same energy will be there where we get to actually live the liberated futures that we want right now. So I encourage everyone to participate in that this year virtually. And then, you know, God willing in the future person.

Um, but visionary fiction is a term I started using to talk about fantastical art that helps us to imagine ways to build different futures that are more just more free, more liberated. And I was doing that work, and then my Octavia's Brood co editor Adrienne



Maree Brown, who is incredible and if you if y'all have not read her work, emergent strategy, pleasure activism, like get your life though and go read. But um, we came together to do Octavia's Brood, which is a visionary fiction collection of fantastical, radical writings by organizers, activists and changemakers. And to us, it's it's visionary fiction is so important, and necessary, because it allows us the space to imagine something different.

And you know, organizers and activists are doing that work every single day. I mean, this moment, especially, you know, folks are saying everything from defund police to abolish police and prisons in the carceral state. That is science fiction, because we haven't seen that world, right. But the premise of Octavia's Brood and the premise of visionary fiction is that all organizing is science fiction. That we have to be able to imagine those futures to build them into existence. So we absolutely need imaginative spaces like visionary fiction, that allow us to say, what if? what if, you know, we win this? What if we get these futures? Even, what if things get worse? How are we are going to continue our organizing work and our visioning work? How are we going to hold these principles and values? How are we going to build these liberated futures? Even if things get worse, which, you know, they get worse and better? That's that's the duality and complexity of life, right and battling oppressive systems.

Nandi: That's good to hear. That's really good to hear. And I love that. You know that this is an approach to like, when times get worse and better like that is really important to me. And we have somebody in the comments in the comments that say, Hey, you know, Octavia's Brood really changed everything for me. I failed to mention that you are one of the editors of Octavia's Brood, along with Adrienne Maree Brown. And that has really like changed the game for a lot of us in the organizing world. And so I wanted to ask you about like that framing in terms of we talked about it in like this amount of imagination. Can you talk a little bit more about like when we're talking about radical movement builders, how is that, can go into that a little bit more about how that really helps reframe the way that we think about what radical movement organizers are doing.

Walidah: Absolutely. I mean, you know, to me visionary fiction is, I guess, you know, a genre, even though you know, genres are our commodity, or commodities created to



sell us things, right? They, they're not real and art doesn't fit into boxes. But I think, to me, visionary fiction is, is intimately rooted in organizing and, and social change and liberation. It's, it's not just a tool, but it is a way of, of engaging, of knowing, of building of imagining into existence. And so I hope, and I, you know, I want to be clear, you know, Adrienne and I, you know, created Octavia's Brood with the incredible writers in it. But, you know, there was, there were and are so many people doing this work, people who've been doing this work for decades who have influenced us, I mean, it's named, Octavia is Brood in honor of Octavia E. Butler of visionary black feminist, science fiction writer and public intellectual.

Uhm, you know, as well as so many other people who are doing that work. And so it has just been incredible to see the ways that this work has been moving through Octavia's Brood, and in an infinite number of ways. The ways that our movements for liberation are working to center this space of radical imagination, powered by action, that's the thing. Right? is that, you know, we need spaces to dream, we need spaces to imagine.

And then we have to do the work of building that into existence. And so, you know, to me, visionary fiction is sort of a way of knowing, and, you know, for, for folks who have read Adrienne's book, Emergent Strategy, I think that is, you know, that's very much a way of being and building that into practice. And so for, for Adrienne and myself, we very much see sort of visionary fiction and emergent strategy, as, you know, a symbiotic as intertwined together. But I think, you know, in every time we need imaginative spaces, but especially in in times of both crisis, and and, and mobilization, which this is, right, and it's so hard to talk about this moment, because folks are, you know, people are like, How are you feeling? And I'm, like, elated and terrified. I'm, you know, inspired and horrified. Incredible and horrific. I don't, all the feelings.

Um, but you know, I think, to me, it's important to recognize that that is, that is human, and that is all movements. And, you know, if we, you know, we look back historically, and we, you know, we kind of clean things up and simplify them. But every, like movement, every peoples that were engaged in real substantive liberation work, we're holding these multiplicities of horror and possibility at the same time, just as we are right now. And so I think it's incredibly important to have imaginative spaces to push



beyond what we're being told is possible in every moment, but especially in this moment.

Nandi: Yeah, I wouldn't, you know, I, I'm gonna put a plus mark in the comments that I'm feeling that I feel that so if y'all are feeling that out, that are tuned in today. Y'all let us know. How are you feeling? Are you feeling it? I also don't have any questions yet. So I just want to make sure I encourage you all, so if you have questions, look at those questions. Yes, thank you. Good luck, snap the tap for that.

Um, I was thinking a lot about how, for a long time, and especially in the Detroit community and in communities all over the country all over the world, we have really believed in, what we have different ways of talking about the community and thinking about how we support one another. When I think about the mamas and the babas who just would have right parties when somebody was in crisis. And to a certain extent, it was seen as something lesser than or something that people who didn't have resources went to when it was in emergency and in crisis. But I think about how that was something that we were laying the groundwork for, for all the things that we have happening now. Right?

We have millions of dollars being raised for the movement, but also for people who've been really deeply indirectly affected by the violence, by COVID. And I think about how the ways in which our community isn't necessarily sometimes like, my grandmother may not have been saying that she was a visionary organizer, but she was. You know? So, I'm thinking today about those that, um, for me kind of, they missed the, they missed the mark in terms of really using their imagination. When we're asking when we're asking our community to use their imagination and to really Dream Big not just think about how do we change the way that we are between big I think, in particular about when we're talking about defunding police departments all over the country? How are we, you know, when we're shifting from reform into that space, where there's a world without police? Can you talk to, how this pushes the working your field even further? How do we how are we shifting in a sense, when we start thinking about that when we and the mainstream start talking about the imaginative world?



Nandi: Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, I think for so much of what you said, is so powerful, I think it's so important, you know, a lot, a lot of folks I've posted folks, I've seen people posting things, you know, basically saying, like, you know, we're all we have, and we're all we need. And I think that's so powerful and so important, and is rooted in the concept of mutual aid. It's rooted in those histories of oppressed communities, as you're talking about communities of color who have, who have always been under-resourced and over exploited, and that have always not only taking care of ourselves, so we survive, but have created and changed the entire world countless times. Like, it's just so important, you know, I think the future seems very terrifying, because it's, it's unknown. But I think it's really, if we root in the past, and I'll talk about this a little bit later, when I do my sort of mini presentation. But if we root in the past, we can see that the future is as certain as the past, right?

Because we have, without a doubt, it's a historical fact, oppressed peoples, people of color communities of color have changed the world countless times in the face of being told by white supremacy, hetero patriarchal institutions that it was impossible. That it was science fiction, that it was a fantasy. We have said, we'll see. And then we all saw, we did it. So that is a historical certainty. And I want us to think about the future as we want as future futuristic certainties. They are as certain as those paths of liberation, because we have, we have a track record where we have done this, y'all! Like without pause, without a doubt. And we are you know, it's it's, it's a it's a futuristic certainty. So I think that framing is so important.

I think it's also you know, one of the things about visionary fiction, I think that, you know, marks it a little different from a certain strategy is emergent, and it's part of it. But, you know, visionary fiction is a place of imagination, and, and play, which is part of emergent strategy. But we need those spaces, as Adrienne calls them testing grounds, we need spaces to practice to play to experiment, because every single one of us has had this system colonizing and recolonizing our minds. Every day telling us, the things that we dream of are not possible. We can't just flip a switch. And obviously, I know all about liberated futures now and I can see them constantly beyond what you're trying to do to me. No, we need to have those spaces collectively to come together, not once, not twice, continually, constantly imagining pushing each other to think further.



And so I think it's important to recognize we are all visionaries. We need to it's, you know, it's a muscle as Mariame Kaba says, hope is a discipline. Visionary organizing, visionary fiction is a muscle. So we just need to practice continually with each other and build that up. And I think, you know, I'm in this moment, specifically, you know, I mean, this is such a powerful moment, and it's so important, because change happens like that sometimes, right? We're growing under the surface, you know, we can't see anything we're like, I'm watering this dirt. Okay, if anything. Why am I watering dirt every day for years, just dirt. But this this is that moment where we're like, oh my god, and we try to keep up like I've been a prison abolitionist for I don't even know how many years 15 years, something like that. And I'm running to keep up. Like, I log on to social media. I'm like, word. Okay. All right. I was not ready for this to be the conversation everyone is having to be like, Hi, my relatives calling me up being like, what about this defund the police. I'm like, alright. I mean, we were arguing about whether or not police officers should go to jail last week. So let's defund the police.

So, you know, I think it's such a powerful, incredible moment. It is a moment that has been created by the visionary work of abolitionists for decades. I think that's incredibly important that this abolitionist work has been happening for decades. And that folks have been laying this groundwork by holding what they were told again, and again, is our unrealistic dreams. I cannot tell y'all, how many times folks have said to me, prison abolition, did you ride in on a unicorn on a rainbow too? like, come on, be real sis, you know what I'm like, I'm like, I'm gonna keep my unicorn. I don't care. You can't take my unicorn.

But so I just want you know, I think it's important to recognize we, you know, these are the visionary spaces, and folks have been holding those through unrealistic dreaming. So we have to be utterly unrealistic in our dreams for the future. And if the mainstream discourse is about defund the police, what is the vision further beyond that? Let us have visionary fiction, so that we can keep dreaming beyond where we are in the present. And as, as the president moves forward, even if it moves forward at lightspeed, then our visionary fiction, our visionary, dreaming moves forward at lightspeed to we're like, Alright, check, check, check, check, check. We got 20 million other things on this list.



Nandi: Right? Movement don't stop. Right. So we got a ton of questions. And I'm gonna I want to make sure that everybody knows that first. Walidah, is going, I'm gonna give her the floor to um, to share a little bit more about this work. Is it is it has it? Can we can I just ask one question before we move into that? Because we had 10 people in the room that voted up Estevan's questions I wanted to get to it. It says- curious, your thoughts on holding a vision becomes more powerful when we believe in the big transformation slash change slash liberation? Seems like part of how we're winning in a movement of expanding imaginaries of abolition is because we were messing around. It wasn't just it wasn't disingenuous for political visionaries. Can you speak to the importance of being dead serious about a massively different world post capitalist, bypassing our economic democracy?

Walidah: That is a big question. I feel like a lot of the answers in the question, you know, that there's a lot of context and framing in that question that's really valuable and a lot to learn from, from just the question itself. So I think that's, that's also important. Um, I mean, I think, you know, one thing that, that Adrienne talks a lot about with emergent strategy is growing possibilities. And, you know, I talked about it in visionary fiction as living in a quantum organizing framework, right, that we live in a quantum universe, we need to have a quantum organizing framework. So to recognize infinite things can exist at the same time, to have, you know, as many entry points and possibilities as possible.

So, I think it's absolutely not only possible, but necessary for us to be deadly serious, even at the same time that we are playing and experimenting, right? Because we never forget, as, as black folks, as brown folks, as oppressed peoples, we never forget that everything we're doing is deadly serious. Because we know that our folks are dying right now. We also know that we have to find, and hold and center, the futures that we want and those futures, our futures rooted in joy and abundance and liberation and beauty and laughter. And so we have to hold all of those pieces together.

I absolutely, you know, agree that these visions for the future visionary fiction is, you know, it's anti capitalist, it is, you know, anti patriarchal, it is rooted in, you know, my understanding, as I guess, for lack of a better term an anarchists. You know, it is rooted in the principles of mutual aid, and I'll talk more about that when I get into my piece. But I think it's incredibly important to recognize we have to root in those principles in those



visions. Visionary fiction, again, is an entry way to have conversations. But we have to have those explicit conversations. I think a lot of time with science fiction, you know, we can take it to you know, we can take it to Panam in Hunger Games, and we can be like, yeah, like, let's blow up that converter! Take down the capital! Right? Literally black folks on the streets in Ferguson the same time and that does not translate, right? So we, we can imagine these worlds, and we have to bring it home. And we have to say, this is what it means capitalism and visionary fiction cannot exist together, there is no possibility of that. Prisons and visionary fiction in our long term vision, obviously, we got to get there, but the vision, the end-vision of visionary fiction cannot be rooted in any sort of carceral mentality. That has to be said explicitly, and then we have to sort of struggle with, you know, with what that means and and engage with folks who are aware, having questions, because we've all lived in the society. But I think it's, it's absolutely important, these aren't just like, everyone can dream, the future and all futures are fine, right? I mean, you can, I'm not saying you can't, if you're gonna call a visionary fiction, there are going to be principles and values.

Nandi: So we're running a little bit over. So I want to get to your presentation. I'm going to, I'm actually going to step back, I'm going to turn off my video. And I'm going to allow you to talk to the people that we have online today, you have a presentation, you know, an informal conversation, and you want to start, so I'm gonna go ahead and turn it over to you, Walidah.

Walidah: Thank you so much, Nandi. And so I just, I wanted to share a few examples with folks. And just some, some more framing. And I'm a visual person, so I have some some slides that I want to share with folks. Um, but so I'm gonna do the screen share. And nope, that's not the right slide. So I'm going to stop that screen share. I'm going to get on the right slide. And then I am going to try this again.

Great, here we go. So talking about visionary fiction, I'm just going to go through it really quickly, I've sort of created a slide to talk it was a great question was a great segway. Um, and I've kind of covered some of this already. So this is just if folks are better as kind of visual learners, or both, or many. That's great. So visionary fiction is fantastical art that helps us to understand and challenge existing power structures and it supports us in imagining cause to dreaming and creating more just worlds.



And so visionary fiction has two key pieces. And I really realized I learned these from reading Octavia Butler's work. So one of the key pieces is identity, right, centering the margin, the leadership of the marginalized and most affected. That these are not stories about people with power, suddenly realizing there's oppression happening. Again, yes and. And I'm not saying visionary fiction is the only kind of fiction that is useful to us, we need all of it. But I think this is an area that needs to be, to grow to be grown. So visionary fiction looks through the eyes of the oppressed, it is absolutely intersectional it centers, you know, queer and trans folks of color with disability who are immigrants who are working class, all of these and more, so much more, all of these multiplicity of identities. Because when we look to the intersections of identity, that's when we see what true liberation can look like.

I'm, I'm going to talk a little more about this piece later. And I'm going to try not go on a time travel rant, because I have I have many, actually. So I'm going to just try and hold that. But it is rooted in decolonized understandings of literature, and of art and struggle. It is rooted in a nonlinear dreaming, that centers and absolutely grows from cultures of color, communities of color. So that's one piece is identity.

The other piece is power, and imagining different relationships to power. Which is, is the part that is often really hard. Because as folks of color, if we're writing, we know, you know, we can kind of write ourselves into these stories, but how do we tell different stories that have different outcomes, different relationships to power? Um, but that's, that's imperative. And I think, you know, for me, that is a huge part of Octavia Butler's work that is so inspiring; is recognizing that we have to engage with power with power inequalities, we have to make visible systems of power. And again, that, that part that is often very challenging, we have to imagine different relationships to power. So you know, this is that part where the principles and values that we work through are incredibly important. And so, change, sort of if you're like, what does that mean a different relationship to power. If we're looking at a visionary fiction story, we find that change is happening from the bottom up, not the top down. It is collective and decentralized. I don't know why these are out of order. This is very exciting.

It is as we said, it's non transactional. It's anti capitalist that should say anti not anti capitalist. It's exciting. But it's soon call. Um, as, as I talked about, and as Adrienne



talked about, its generative, it grows more possibilities. It is existing in a quantum framework of visioning and organizing. It is holistic and to the bone it is not surface reform, which we could talk so much about that right now. Um, it is relational. It recognizes that the relationship between two people is a reflection of the movement we're building, how we treat one another is part of that change. Because there is no end point to liberation. There's no point where we're like, Whoa, we're completely liberated. Now, we no longer have to continue growing or trying to imagine even better futures that will be a continual process. And so how we treat each other is not only as important as the world we're creating, it is the world that we are creating.

And the last piece is just visionary fiction is not neutral. As my Octavia brood co editor Adrienne Maree Brown says, all art either advances or regresses justice. And we are very clear that we're on the side of justice. And so you know, one of the things in kind of envisioning this workshop with Nandi and with Allied Media was wanting to share some of the tools that we created through Octavia's Brood and that I've created on my own to create some of these generative collective visioning spaces. And so I want to, I want to share some of those tools with you and go through them. And we will actually, hopefully, be doing a little tiny bit of visioning together at the end.

But so one of the workshops that, that we created was around world building. Sci fi writing and visioning. So collectively, folks, groups come together and imagine a world that allows them to explore specific social issues. So you know, in these moments, policing, prisons, I mean, there's so many, but you know, that how do we create fantastical worlds whether they're set, you know, in the future, in the past, and another world under the water? Whether they're creatures made of light, or aliens or us with telekinesis? What is, what are the fantastical worlds we can create that will help us to explore these social issues. So we do that collectively, we come together, because we recognize we are so much more ingenious and creative and brilliant together.

But then folks do individual writing within that world because there's still space for our individuality, individual creativity and brilliance within the collective. We don't have to choose. And so often we're presented with that false dichotomy. Either it's collective or it's individual. It's both. And so how do we create within our visioning spaces for both of those brilliances to shine through.



So another workshop that was originally created by Morgan Philips I love and you see, I'm wearing my Star Wars t-shirt, and I really don't have time for my Star Wars rants, y'all. But there are so many of us nerds who have invested so much time in these franchises, because we see things that speak to us, especially as radical nerds. The hope, of rebellion, of joining a rebel alliance. But these franchises which are created by giant corporations, often, you know, fail us and disappoint us. And so Morgan created this incredible sci-fi and direct action workshop, where you take existing fantastical franchises, you embody the oppressed people within that franchise, and then you develop direct action tactics within that franchise to help those people get free. And it is the funnest workshop that I've ever been part of.

And it also is really, I think, useful in thinking about planning strategies, tactics. It's a fun way to do strategic planning and to practice the ability to do that. And so I just wanted to pull out a few examples from those workshops have what comes out of it.

So in terms of like the Harry Potter group one formed the House Elf Liberation Front. Also it's amazing because people stand up and they're like- We are the House Elf Liberation Front! Like they embody this, y'all. It's amazing. Um, in terms of Middle Earth in Lord of the Rings, there was a Arukai Capoeira resistance movement that was started because they were the oppressed peoples within that narrative. Ender's Game battle room lock ins where you go into the battle room where these young kids are supposed to fight and lock in and you, you don't fight and you don't allow anyone else to use the room. From Wizard of Oz, a yellow brick road March and shut down of the yellow brick road itself is the main thoroughfare thorough Oz. Panam free breakfast survival programs modeled after the Black Panther Party in Hunger Games.

And I do have to say I think this might be my favorite, the uncle Luba flash mobs from Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory where they go out and use their singing skills to win support for their cause as oppressed workers. So again, I think you know this, it shows the multiplicity, we can engage with existing franchises and subvert them and reimagine them and make them as much ours as possible, while also creating spaces where we start from scratch. Where we imagine from scratch for ourselves.



So, you know, just in terms of thinking about, I'm imagining these different futures, and especially in this moment, you know, where people are talking about defunding the police to abolishing a police and prisons. I wanted to share this quote by the visionary Alexis Pauline Gumbs. If you have not read her work, you absolutely should. She has a trilogy that includes some just spill, em archives, dub, they are gorgeous and phenomenal. But she had this, this quote she wrote in an essay in the collection *Abolition Now: what if abolition isn't a shattering thing? Not a crashing thing? Not a wrecking ball of that? What if abolition is something that sprouts out of the wet places in our eyes, the broken places in our skin? What if abolition is something that grows?*

And I think that framing is so important for us. To recognize that abolition obviously will involve tearing down, prisons have to go, police have to go. These institutions have to be dismantled entirely, they cannot be reformed? So I, you know, I'm absolutely saying we can take wrecking balls to some things. But I think that other piece that Alexis is talking about, is why we need visionary fiction. What are we going to grow in this space?

Because, you know, if we if we burn down the prisons, we know that that makes the soil richer, right? So what are we going to grow in that soil? What are we going to transplant that we've been growing in our communities in these pots in our gardens? How are we going to bring that together? And so you know, for me, I think one piece that really stood out was Black Lives Matter a few years ago, put out this incredible visionary call that was about growing abolition, and they asked black folks to respond to the prompt: In a world where Black Lives Matter, I imagine...

And I was so thankful for this, this prompt being put into the world so that we can begin to tangibly think about, you know, what would that be like? How can we? Because once we make it tangible, then it feels close enough to touch close enough to taste. So you know, I think, when we're talking about how do we grow abolition, as Alexis talks about. This is a key part is creating those, those ways of engagement around that. I think another key part is to root in history. And as I talked about before in that decolonize, nonlinear exploit exploration of liberation, to build liberated futures, we must root in liberated pasts. And so to recognize this is something we have done again and again.



These dreams that we have are in communion with our ancestors. It's not something that our ancestors passed down and it's gone from them and now we hold it. It's more a laying on of hands, and everyone who comes lays more hands but we are all touching and healing and building the same thing. And so you know, for me that's really embodied in this, the West African Adinkra symbol, sankofa, which translates to go go back and get what is lost. That idea that rooted in African understandings of time and existence rooted in other communities of color, really, every community of culture. Time was not linear, it was cyclical, it was varied, you could go back, you could always go back, it was never lost to us. And so, you know, for me, I think it's really important to see that piece. And to root in that, the dreams of our ancestors, we are, we are the dreams of our ancestors. But we are also dreaming our dreams with our ancestors. They didn't stop dreaming. We're all part of this collective dream. And we're all part of this collective action and struggle.

And so you know, just talking about abolition, because I'm someone who is a historian. I did just want to root in the Black Panther Party. And just be clear, you know, again, these abolitionist views have been held for decades. And I think a lot of folks who are hearing about abolition for the first time or like, this could never work, What are y'all talking about, but it's important to note, it has worked. You know, around the world, historically, currently futuristically and that there have been folks, you know, in this country calling for abolition and building alternatives. And the Black Panther Party was one of those organizations, it was an abolitionist organization, which is not necessarily always framed about. But if you look at their 10 point platform, in 1972, they their point number nine, is talking about the criminal legal system-we want freedom for all black and poor oppressed peoples, now held in US federal, state, county, city, and military prisons and jails. We want trials by a jury of peers for all persons charged with so called crimes under the laws of this country.

And then they added- we believe in the ultimate elimination of all wretched inhuman penal institutions, because the masses of men and women in prison inside the United States or by the US military, are the victims of oppressive conditions, which are the real cause of their imprisonment. Right? Like this abolitionist framework is not new. The Panthers were a sci-fi organization, building that future into existence, futures, where children are fed, and there's free healthcare for everyone. And there are no prisons.



And there's mutual aid and communities are rooted in a communal, anti, anti capitalist way of existing. They were sci fi visionary creators.

And so to just know, when we're talking about the ancestors were dreaming with when we're talking about this work, these are some of the ancestors that we are dreaming with. Um, so I just, I want to stop there and just give a little space because I know that was a lot. But that was, you know, I just want to take us through a time a little bit there.

Nandi: Ah, whoo. You know, so as a writer, I really appreciate this also, just like so many ways, and you have a lot of people in the chat and in the question and answer and just really responding. I think the thing that really hit me was I think, oftentimes, they'll make a visionary future, visionary futures and visionary fiction as like always thinking about tomorrow. And I love that there's a space for us to think about history versus think about yesterday. These questions blew up, Walidah, you got a lot of questions here.

And I think I'm gonna collapse. Three questions into one, when they're thinking about the practical, you're thinking about how do we get others engaged, that maybe aren't working in the movement, but also how do we make these practical make this framework that feels so like, outside of our real into, like, real practical steps towards getting people involved? I'm, I'm hoping I gave justice to the, to those three questions about practical work.

Walidah: Yeah, no, I think that's really important. And I think that's, you know, that's part of why, you know, I always encourage folks to read Adrienne's book Emergent Strategy because I think so much of that is about sort of taking these shared principles and values of visionary fiction and emergent strategy and saying, how do we move it in the world? I think to me, again, I want to think about this, you could think about a however is useful. So I'm not like it is this right? It's fluid. It's changing. Um, but you know, I, I think it's, it is a tool. So you can have specific tools where you're like, let's do a visioning session every meeting. Let's do a community visioning session around this, let's do a community writing wall, right? Where everyone is encouraged to write up



their ideas. Like, there are so many different ways to incorporate this that are small and large. And I think it's important to note like, the small is important as well, right.

But I think again, for me, it's also a way of, of knowing and a way of being. So when I am, I'm engaged both personally and politically. And especially when I come to that moment where I'm like, there's just two options, and I hate them both. And I don't want either of them. That's a moment where I'm like, well, then how do I visionary fiction this, right? Because there are never just two options. If you are in a situation where you're being told they're just two options, that is probably a place where you are under some form of sort of control, or someone trying to say, this is all there is just a look here. And then using visionary fiction as a way of knowing and engaging with the world, so you can take a step back and say, that can't be true.

Also, you know, for me, again, visionary fiction is deeply rooted in the collective. So knowing part of visionary fiction is reaching out to folks and saying, you know, it seems like, I'm only being offered these two options. Are we as an organization? Are we as a movement, or as being told we can have this or this? How do we create something different? I mean, I think that, I mean, that is so true. happening right now, right? Like, we can see the current mobilization and incredible visionary protests on the ground as a response to being offered, you know, do you want to Trump or Biden, right? Like, there's this idea that the system over and over again, says there there are these set ways of making change, they are very limited, they are actually pretty, very similar, right? And folks saying, then we go outside of that, right? If this change is not going to come from here, then we go outside of that, and we see incredible responses where things we were told would never happen or happening like that overnight, right? City Council's being like, yeah, bye police, bye bye, like, you just last week, you wouldn't even want to charge nobody, and now the bullies are just gone, they just gone.

So you know, that is the work on the ground. And to me, that is visionary fiction. So it is their tools, their strategies, their ways of knowing, to me that there are also ways of talking about things and showing the connection between them. So, you know, to me, as a black woman, I think of enslaved black folks as the most incredible sci fi visionary fiction creators ever, right? Because they dreamed, liberated worlds under I can't even imagine the most brutal, oppressive conditions, and then changed the world to make



that a closer lived reality. And so, you know, it's, I offer it as something and, and, when I think of them in that way, I feel close to them. I feel like they're right here. Because they're like, we did it, you got this, right. So to me, it is a it's also a framework that that links, the past, the present and the future together in a way that I can feel the future and the past breathing with me.

So you know, I think there are very practical ways to incorporate this. You know, that's part of why I wanted to share some of the workshops that we've done. Um, but I also think for me, it is a way of rooting in when the system is trying to recolonize our minds and tell us this is all that's possible. It's a way of breathing out and expanding my wings and saying, No, I know, that's not true, because I've got the past and the future right here telling me it's not true. So you're gonna do this.

Nandi: So um, I think this is a good time for us to transition into practice, when we talk about practical, let's talk about the practice. We actually are going to invite everybody that's on the, that's on the zoom chat, I'm sorry, to the hundreds now, because I looked at the YouTube, there are hundreds of people looking on YouTube. But for the people that are in the zoom call, we're actually going to do an exercise. This is, this will be our last thing for the event. I'm going to let Walidah guide us through a communal writing activity. So those that are participating in the zoom, make sure that you using the comment section because we are going to have this collective process and we want to make sure that everyone's lines and things are seen. So I'll turn it back over to you, walidah.

Walidah: Yeah, thank you. Yeah. So you know, this is this is short, we just want to get your brains thinking about this, or I'm sure everyone's brain is already thinking about this, but just whatever, offer whatever I have to bring. Um, but we wanted to end by by actually engaging in that practice. So what I'm going to do is ask folks to respond to a prompt in the chat. And you know, as soon as you feel ready, you can start posting. We have a shared Google Doc, we're going to be putting that into, and I've just put it on the screen. So hopefully everyone can see it. But asking you to respond, you know, in the vein of that Black Lives Matter prompt that I shared before, - What will ,not what would, let's be clear. What will a liberated future a world without police and prisons look like? Sound like, feel like, tastes like?



So you can start, you know, responding just one sentence something short, I know, I'm sure there are so many poets and creators, but we're going to be as you post in the comments, putting it into this collective document so we can sort of see it together. So you can start whenever, um, you know, I've offered a couple of ideas, if you're like, I don't, what do you how do you want me to respond to that. So you could write it as a liberated future smells like and then you know, fill in the blank, right? Um, it sounds like, or you can just write, like the taste of, you know, my mom, uh, you know, cooking or whatever, you know, that was, you know, I'm sure you'll come up with better ones.

But you know, what, however, you want to respond to that prompt, and we're gonna be putting it here. And just, you know, so you're like, you know, one of the reasons I think, for me, it's really useful to root in, in the senses. Because it makes it more visceral and tangible for folks, it makes it feel more real, like you can reach out and touch it, you can taste it, you can smell it. And that's what we need to be doing for these futures is making it feel as real, like we can hear it breathing, it is right next to us, all we have to do is reach out and take this futures hands, and we are going to be we're going to be be moving together. So that's one of the reasons you know, I'm a poet, and I like to root in the senses, because I think it's, it's incredibly useful to do that. So please feel free to keep, you know, posting your responses, your comments, again, either framed as any of these options, or, or anything else you want to do, those are just suggestions, not, you know, not dictates or something like that.

So, and folks can see where we're having we're populating now, and these beautiful visions of a liberated future. And I think, again, rooting in that idea of what will a liberated future look like? Not what could it look like? One of the one of the practices that I do is having folks write the futures they want, in the past tense as if they've already happened. And I think that is really important, because it allows us as I was saying, before, to claim those futures with the same certainty we claim in the past. Right? You know, if we want the prison to fall then right and say, in the year 2062, we closed the last prison in this country, and, you know, curious how we got there through the creative, courageous organizing work of folks on the ground. Um, but I think, you know, that idea of claiming this futures, the futures we want, as historical fact, as something that is a certainty.



And so, you know, I just, I just encouraged myself, I try to do this. And I encourage everyone else, when we talk about these futures, to not say like, Oh, you know, maybe, possibly, hopefully, but to say, we are going to do this, this, this will be part of our lived existence. Because the other thing is, when we have that concrete vision, we can be pulling that future into the present over and over and over again, right.

And so, it's, we don't have to wait for some far off time in the future, we can just, we can do it. Like at the Allied Media Conference. Where every time I've gone, I feel like for these four or five days, this is us together, pulling that future into the present and living that liberation that we want. And it may only last for four days, or five days or an hour or a conversation. But we can do that all, always we have the power to pull these futures into the present. So we claim them, then we can build them now and we can continue to build them. Until that's all there is. That's just our life, our existence.

Um, so I know we're nearing the end of time. So I'm just going to read some of what has been posted here. So we can Can we can share that. So, a liberated future feels like walking without fear. Family sounds like laughter, non isolation in communities and neighborhoods. A liberated future smells like the morning after it rains. A liberated future feels like full lungs, easy breathing. A liberated future tastes like the wet spring as it turns to summer. life affirming policies a liberated future feels like freedom without fear. A liberated future is knowing your community will be there for you in times of need.

Sounds like breathing. A liberated future sounds like children laughing joyfully, the rich looming smell of soil crawling with worms. Real mental health care. A liberated future tastes like a glass pitcher of cool water in the middle of the table. It sounds like music shared between neighbors out the doors windows, tears and laughter warm holding of one another forgiveness and acceptance the knowing. Smells like a lavender field. It will look like the color of gardens blooming in every neighborhood. A liberated future feels like everyone is dancing through every day. A liberated future smells like clean, fresh air scented with blooming Jasmine tastes like a fresh peach. The juice running down your chin. Feels like open space and sunshine on skin tastes like fresh vegetables grown for our community. A liberated future sounds like a quiet sky, choppers and planes no longer surveil our communities.



So I know folks are posting more. But that that was so beautiful. I went into shock because I was like, this is poetry in motion. Literally, it's being added this this. This is beautiful. This vision is incredible. So I'm going to stop sharing my screen right now. But thank you all for sharing that. You know, you can keep posting, we'll be adding to that. And I think that's beautiful. We just wrote a collected liberated poem on a zoom with 200 people. So we did that. Ah!

Nandi: oh my god, I'm just doing here. Um, yeah, thank you so much Walidah. This was, um, I mean, I'm just like, so inspired right now, I'm inspired by all the comments, we will be adding to this document, and we will post it along with the video on YouTube. Once it goes live, I saw somebody saying I'm gonna, as soon as this is over, I'm gonna watch it immediately. So we probably won't take it out too quickly. Just so you all know, I just want to, again, thank you so much for this, this is I don't get enough. I don't get enough of you in my life in Detroit. And so this was truly a pleasure personally. And I know it was a delight for everyone that was watching both in the zoom and in YouTube.

So I just also want to remind everybody, that this is the third of four events that we have going on. The Virtual Love Virtual Healing series is sponsored by Allied Media Projects and the Allied Media Projects Speaker's Bureau in particular. But we also have another big virtual event coming up in July. That's right, the Allied Media Conference that Walidah was referring to, it has gone completely virtual. Unfortunately, we can't gather in Detroit, but we will be gathering online July 23 through 26th. We invite you to register, to join to come and fellowship and learn about like what actually we're talking about when we're saying you for liberation.

And then also before that we have our final session is Virtual Love Virtual Healing you will be we've asked Healing by Choice and organization here located in Detroit, but has people from all over who really foster healing in various ways. We've invited them to take over the whole hour long session, they're going to be focusing on black healing two of their practitioners will be coming on and giving us some some practical ways in which we can work through this difficult time. I invite all of you all to look into it. We are still, the practitioners will be deciding on how we will be prioritizing black lives for that. So



we ask that our allies be looking out for the ways in which the session will be mapped out. Other than that, thank you so much Walidah for joining us.

Walidah: I'm sorry, I just wanted to say thank you to you personally, Nandi. Because you are just incredible and also an amazing poet in your own right. So I hope everyone checks out your work, but I just I really want to thank Allied Media Projects. You know, the Speaker's Bureau has been such an amazing home. And You know, in this time of Coronavirus, events are canceled, you know a lot of us, that's how we make our money. And so a lot of us are like, oh, okay, we do in some visioning on this budget, right? And so Allied Media, in general, the Speaker's Bureau has just been so incredible trying to create spaces like this online, to support community based artists and organizers and presenters and speakers, so that we can continue doing this work as well. And so I mean, Allied Media has always been so visionary and supportive, but especially, you know, in this time of Coronavirus, I've just been so appreciative of y'all saying, okay, we can't do things how we normally do, let's vision, something else, and coming up with this beautiful series. So thank you all for that.

Nandi: Thank you for saying that. I really, really take that to heart because it is definitely we have definitely been trying to keep our I don't think of it just as our speakers. I think the people on our roster are people who are community leaders. And so when we're talking about people who are losing their income, we really want to make sure if it means that somebody in our community is, is losing money towards groceries are losing money towards their rent, we really want to make sure that you feel supported. You can find out more about the Speaker's Bureau on the website, I believe Scheherazade has been holding it down in the link situation. But she's I mean, I have to say thank you to Jon who's in the background, and also to Scheherazade who helped us type up the contributions to today's poem and has also been providing the links. And also, also thank you for all of the Allied Media staff. And thanks again Walidah, for joining us today. I look forward to seeing everyone else in the next session or at that Allied Media Conference or around the train. Just come up and say hi, have you seen me before and tell me how you met. All right. Thank you again. Have a good day.

Walidah: Thank you.

