

# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

## SNCC 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference

### October 2021

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**Speakers include:**

**Dr. Geri Augusto - Interim Director of Development Studies at The Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University**

**Phil Agnew - Organizer and Artist**

**Medina Abdullah - Professor and Chair at California State University, Los Angeles**

**Ash Lee Woodard Henderson - Co-Executive Director, Highlander Research and Education Center**

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**This discussion centers around the current state of the Black Community, the more urgent issues plaguing it, and some effective strategies for addressing these issues. What effects will technology have on future grassroots organizing?**

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**Dr. Geri Augusto:** Good afternoon. I am Geri Augusto, a member of the SNCC[Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] legacy project board. I'd like to welcome you to the panel. Where do we go from here? I want to frame our panel with a slight twist to the title. It's going to be a conversation about how you see it here. What is the future? Where and what are some of the concrete paths for getting there? But first, let me take a moment with great pleasure to introduce the panelists whose more extended bios may be found on the conference agenda.

We have Ash-Lee Henderson, an Affrilachian<sup>1</sup> from Southeast Tennessee and executive director at the Highlander Research and Education Center. We have Melina Abdullah, a professor of Pan-African studies<sup>2</sup> and co-founder of the Los Angeles chapter of Black Lives Matter. We have Phil Agnew, a native Chicagoan and co-founder of the Dream Defenders and Miami's Smoke Signals Studio Conversation.

By telling us briefly what here looks like to you and then illuminating for us a path to a future where for black folks, you remember [Ella Baker](#) said to give light and the people who will find a way. Some of the kinds of things that you might want to put into the question, your answer implicitly, are maybe technology, maybe demographics, maybe protection of our communities, maybe solidarity with others, but it's up to you.

We will want you to answer, as you see fit, before we start. I want to mention to our audience that if you have questions you'd like to see addressed, please submit them to the Q&A that you should be seeing on screen. We might not be able to address them all today during this session,

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<sup>1</sup> Affrilachian- An African American person native of the Appalachian region.

<sup>2</sup> Pan-African Studies- academic discipline that examines the history, culture, and contributions of people of African descent to world civilization.

but we appreciate hearing from you. You can learn more about the work of each of the panelists at the SNCC 60th website, where this session will be archived. So I'd like to ask Melina [Abdullah] if you would start us off please, and each one is gonna speak for about 10 minutes, Melina.

**Melina Abdullah:** Sure. Thank you so much for having me and thank you for your work. Thank you for forging a path for so many of us. I'm also grateful to share virtual space with two of my favorite people on this earth. Phil [Agnew] and Ash-Lee [Woodward-Henderson], who, I'm sorry, Ash-Lee, we're not in a little hole-in-the-wall bar tonight, but maybe we can have a virtual drink after.

We are in an exciting time. We are in a time when we look at the last year and a half. I've talked about this period as a moment when the world is cracked wide open. A moment when the spirit of [George Floyd](#), [Breonna Taylor](#) and [Ahmad Aubrey](#), and also people in our cities like Dijon Kizzee, and [Fred Williams](#) are holding open a portal that enables us to imagine and build from our most radical spaces.

I don't watch a lot of TV, but also I don't think it's coincidental that over the last year and a half, my favorite show has become Lovecraft Country. I think often about the kind of parallels between that show, if you're not watching it, I don't know that there's gonna be another season, but go back and watch it first season.

Lovecraft Country is about this moment in history and it is a black futurist, it feels like watching an [Octavia Butler](#) novel, and it was said in 1955, and Emmett Till is murdered, and I'm not given away too much. You'll still watch it. [Emmett Till](#) is murdered. His friend "D" who's a little black girl from Chicago, is kind of this being that is forced to challenge to engage in the African principle of Sankofa going back and getting it right.

There's all of these things that happen. But "D" is challenged to go back to 1921, Tulsa, Oklahoma, and learn lessons and bring things back for a reimagined future. And to make sure D gets what she needs to get. And to make sure that, we don't lose the moment her mother and her entire community are entrusted to following her into the past, to bring it forward, to bring those lessons forward. I feel like this is also that moment. In the show, it's her mother Hippolyta.

Who's holding open the portal to making, to make sure that "D" returns with these lessons that are necessary to forge a future? And I feel like we are in moments. We are in a moment now where that portal is closing. So the world was cracked wide open in May 2020, the world is opened. The portal is wide open. As it's opened, there's all of these things which were challenged around. Do we say we wanna reform fundamentally oppressive systems?

Do we say that we're going to make the world okay by passing new laws or are we gonna have the bravery to reimagine a future? I think that most of us stepped into a space that said, we're

gonna fundamentally reimagine the world. That's what defunding the police was about and is about that. We have decided to be brave and say, if they're gonna steal the life of our Emmett till then, we're going to make sure that those lives and those spirits are honored in really fundamental ways.

We're gonna say that there are no more systems that spit in the faces. When you watch, the show, you'll understand what I'm saying, spit in the faces of our D's who have survived these moments. We're not going to allow for the theft of our Emmett or our George's or our Breonna's life without actually fundamentally changing the world. So we have been doing that work, and now the portal is closed.

So, just like the Sankofa, the Sankofa bird is a bird whose crane has its neck completely backward to pull forward the lessons of the past, but its feet are planted firmly forward. Right? So what does our forward look like? I think, to honor Dijon Kizzee, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd honor all of those who we say we are working for to say the names of the freedom fighters who walked before us to say the name Mama Harriet Tubman <sup>3</sup> or Baba [Nat Turner](#) or Mama [Sojourner Truth](#), or [Ida B. Wells](#) to say their names and mean it right to be worthy of uttering the name Fannie Lou Hamer, we have to be willing to do the work of abolition.

Abolition means that our feet are planted forward to say that we are gonna dismantle the things that we're set up to bring our demise. We are gonna bring an end to police and prisons and even capitalism. We're gonna bring their end. And when we talk about abolition, abolition means two things. It means destroy, destroy those things that were meant to bring our demise.

It means topple. It means topple those things that were meant to put a target on George Floyd's back, who should be celebrating his 48th birthday with his daughter. It means topple those systems, but it also means to build new systems. It means to build systems where I think about other black fathers, like [Grechario Mac](#), I think about other black mothers, that [Redel Jones](#) at four foot, 10 inches tall, the mother of Titania and Sakari shouldn't have been gunned down in a neighborhood in south central Los Angeles, because she was accused of stealing \$80.

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

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<sup>3</sup> Harriet Tubman - an abolitionist and activist who helped free African American slaves using the Underground Railroad

**Melina Abdullah:** Y'all remember meeting me at 3:00 PM after school did what every single high school student did, which was to have a fight at 3:00 PM and then go home. She should have been allowed to go home. Then she should have been talked to by her mother and maybe some counselors and given whatever was going on, given some resources for whatever was going on with her. But what should have not happened is that a school police officer gunned this child down as she tried to make it home to her five-month-old baby, we have a sacred duty to protect Mona Rodriguez.

We have a sacred duty to protect our children. I'm the mother of an 11-year-old, a 15-year-old and a 17-year-old. They have a right to be at school and be nurtured and play and still talk about anime. To do the things that schoolchildren do. We absolutely how we get to the future, and how we make sure that that portal doesn't close ahead of us is we have to think about who are the bravest and most imaginative among us.

They are our young people. They are people like, you know, I think about Kila Williams who helped us defund school police by 35% in <sup>4</sup>LA USD. I think about Myam Mara. When we celebrated that 35% defunding got on the mic the very next day and said, yeah, we can celebrate the 35%, \$25 million is a lot, but we're not stopping now. We want all of it. We're coming for all of it. We have to be willing to be as radical courageous and imaginative as our children like Amara, Kalallah, and Ahmed, we're coming for all of it. We will topple every system systems that keeps us unhoused ,some systems that keep us under resources under-resourced. And we will radically imagine a new world that gives our people all of what we want and most of what we need.

**Phil Agnew:** Hey, good afternoon. Good morning, everyone. I think we could probably end the panel here. The doctor already laid it out and, people always say that, but truly, what the doctor already laid out is, a lot of what I would say. I'm happy to be here. I'll echo the previous comments and, just say thank you to everybody who had a hand in corraling me and us, to being here.

I know it wasn't an easy job doing that. Also to the SNCC elders who, have consistently been some feet for me to sit at, kind of some shoulders for me to cry on some guidance for me to look to over the years, people often, very often make up this story about how the younger folks don't talk to the older folks and why can't we get people in the room?

I say, every single time, I'm sorry for you, but that hasn't been my experience. It never has been my experience. So in particular, the SNCC elders and everybody at Duke [University], everybody in the, the whole of North Carolina is a special home for me and a place where I've been able to go for refuge and guidance consistently, in my work and in my practice of being a better organizer. So I can't go forward without thanking you all, every single one of you, for who you've been, and those that we have lost for who they still are for me, in this. And I hope to repay that forward, um, Dr. Meli Mail [Melina Abdullah] already laid it out, you know, and I'm

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<sup>4</sup> LAUSD- Los Angeles Unified School District

gonna agree with the fact that the here and now is a world that has been torn us under, you know, we live under a capitalist empire and for the inadequacies, the inhumanity, the insanity of capitalism to flourish, it needs to tell a good story over and over and over and over and over again.

It needs to be reinforced over and over and over again. And when, in some reality, one of those stories proves true. We need to tell that story over and over and over again, even though it's the exception and not the rule. We have existed in a time where every single one of those stories has been blown out of the water, where capitalism, globalism, racism, sexism, white supremacy, misogyny, none of it makes sense to anybody anymore.

It makes less sense to those young people that Dr. Mel is talking about than any other generation prior. And so we have a legitimate opportunity before capitalism, before the global empire that we live under, begins to tie it back up in a bow, this new story that it'll have. That new story is that everybody is a brand.

Everybody is a corporation. Everybody can make money if you just get on the internet and you can have all the things that you want. That's the new story now: you're no longer a slave to the corporation because you are a corporation in and of yourself. They're already working on a new story. Before they do that, as Dr. Mel said, we have a legitimate opportunity.

To tell our own story, the doctor talked about Sankofa, and what I'll do is not spend my whole 10 minutes piggybacking on the brilliance. But talk about what I think for where we go from here is that we need to go back once again and return to building organizations. It is falling out of Vogue. Obviously, you got three people on here, four people on here that know about the beauty and the pain, the gift, and the curse of helping to start an organization and shepherding an organization.

But there has been no other proven method of revolutionary radical change, but through the vehicle of organization, individuals, no matter how popular, no matter how many followers, no matter how charismatic and attractive, handsome, or beautiful have never been the vehicle for the social transformation that is required at this moment, before that story gets retold.

We have another 20 years of the neoliberal nightmare that we've been living under. And so what I would say, what I want to impart into this conversation is that from SNCC, from Black Panther elders, from my peers, what I've learned consistently is the importance of building organization. People are questioning almost everything right now. Identities are being challenged in every corner of the world, right? Politics are being re-articulated.

This is an exciting, fun time to be alive. It is an amazing time to be alive, but if we do not do the slow, arduous, hard thankless work of building, developing, and nurturing member-based organizations, not just organizations in and of themselves, because it has a name or a, a building

right, or massive funds, but member-based organizations, we are gonna lose all of this excitement.

At this moment, our opposition is incredibly organized, rank and file up. They fall in line. They fall in love, they move and they're aligned. So if we think that we are a ragtag group of dreamers. Believers of people with God on our side are gonna be able to withstand this organized machine. I hate to say that we are wrong. So what does it take really to build an organization?

I think there are a lot of great books and texts and movies and things to study. I'm just gonna offer some of the things from my personal experience in helping to build organizations. I think that if we don't take the time to develop organizations with a foundation of love then we are gonna lose love and spirit. Then we are gonna lose. So there are a lot of organizations that are built around anger and rage, and those are incredibly palatable and galvanizing and catalytic emotions.

But if our organizations are not built around love and community, not things that you should roll your eyes at, but genuine love and community. Our organizations are gonna die. The masses already know how bad the world is. They already know how much destruction surrounds them, how low their pay is, how high their rent is, and how high their blood pressure is.

But if you don't have an organization that people love and want to be around, then we are gonna lose. When I'm thinking about what makes a great organization, I think that we need organizations filled with love and filled with spirit. Ash-Lee[Lee-Henderson], how do we have a movement where people don't sing anymore? Where people are not dancing anymore. So those are the things that we need at this moment when you're building organizations; you need organizations with focused goals.

We need organizations with focused goals right now. Goals, intent on building up power and member-based power right now. When you gather these things together, that love that community, that focus on power, you've got a good bedrock for organizations. I think truthfully, and I'll bring it to a close cause I want to hear from Ashley.

If we don't right now, in this re-articulation moment that doc is talking about, and we're gonna talk about people who are looking to belong to something. People are looking for places of not just togetherness, but where they can, um, seek and to find truth. We're working with black men to build the organization that I helped start last year with a bunch of other brothers and sisters.

To organize and transform black men to be in service of all black people. We're not a boys club. We're trying to just bring, bring brothers together to do what they need to do and get right. Brothers and all of our people want a place where they can go and see what they see on the internet and read on the internet. They can go and talk about it and get some truth. Right now,

what's happening is when people question everything; people question truths, right? Long hail truths.

That is a beautiful thing because many people are questioning the orthodoxy of this thing that we've been living in, but it doesn't mean that nothing is true. So we have to reassert that our way of being is a truthful way of being is an honest way of being. So people are looking for organizations that also represent truth. As we look forward, where do we go from here?

My proposition, I propose that we go back again, the church still exists because it is an organization filled with spirit filled with love and its version of the truth, but they got music and they've got all other things. I think if our movement is gonna capture this opportunity, keep that portal open, make sure that other people can get through, create space for imagination, create space for those moonshot ideas.

We need to return to building organizations, make that the thing that we do make that the coolest thing that you can be a part of, more than just sharing more than just the marching. All of those things are incredibly important and potent, but until we build the infrastructure that can outlast us, we're gonna kind of continue to be in this. So that's where I think we go and I'm really happy to pass it to Dr. Ash-Lee Henderson.

**Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson:** I love it. I love it.

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

**Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson:** Thank you so much, Geri. I'd be remiss not to gush a little bit about what it means to be in this virtual sacred space with people who not only do I like, but I do love this is a bit of a family reunion. I feel moved just to see your faces, and then to be even more specific, Highlander and SNCC have a 60-year-long love affair. So, though I have not experienced all 60 of those years as a 36-year-old. I have been the inheritor of, the beauty of that, of that dynamic kinship. I bring greetings to SNCC legacy, from your family on the hill. I think this question not only is timely, but I think it's critical.

I am by no means an expert on everything that happens in the whole of the United States or across the black diaspora. But what I do know is the south. And so I'm gonna use us as an example of what I know for certain about where we are. What is the here? What is here is COVID-19. I live in a state where the percentage of black COVID deaths is higher than the percentage of the black population of the state and where climate change is here.

We've been in a year of never-nonstop man-made climate disaster, whether it was the winter storms in the winter, snow, and ice like we had never seen in this region into tornado season, into

hurricane season, which is still not over. And then as soon as it is, we'll be right back in the winter super storms.

Where we are is capitalism. Right. I live in a region where the highest concentration of low-wage work is ironically also where the highest concentration of black people and LGBTQplus people live insurrection is here. We are an insurrection at times. Militarism<sup>5</sup> is here. White nationalism and paramilitary forces are here. Right. I know that I can keep going for days. Right. There's no question. Many of you even watching probably are like, man, that's the reason why all the liberals need to move to the South. Right.

But, before you come to save the endangered black hillbillies, let me tell you the other side of what is also true about what is here. Mutual aid was born here. It's still here, solidarity economies. It's funny always to hear people talk about [Fannie Lou Hamer](#) because of everything that she built, whether it was fighting for racial justice SNCC, black liberation, very specifically, whether it was building social solidarity economies, right?

She believed in cooperatives whether it was food justice and land stewardship over ownership, that that stuff was stuff that she already did, whether it was talking about governance and government through the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), right? Those things still exist in the South. We are not a place without infrastructure and lessons, community defense is still here, and abolition is born here.

The first abolitionist newspaper was written in East Tennessee. A place that would've seceded from the Confederacy had our state seceded from the Union. Reparations are here. Not only in terms of the tools, we need to be able to fight for it, but very literally campaigns that are successfully winning reparations. The fight for electoral justice is just as alive as the never-ending onslaught of the white rights attempts to suppress our ability to do so.

Right. I could go on, but the point to me about going down the bad list and the good list is that very little of this can be ignored, particularly in the context of last year and this year moving into next year. Considering what the South has already told you about itself and its ability to prove to you, that so goes as goes to the South. So goes the nation. Isn't an opinion. It's a fact, right? There's no way you could be in love with SNCC so much so that you would spend your weekend at this 60th-anniversary conference and celebration.

If you didn't know that the largest social movement in us history that showed itself powerful last year was only a manifestation of the 21st-century blossom of, 20th-century SNCC seeds. Right. I'm not saying that SNCC was the only, before all my CORE[ Congress of Racial Equality] and, Black Panther party family gets mad at me.

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<sup>5</sup> Militarism- the belief or desire of a government or people that a country should maintain a strong military capability and be prepared to use it aggressively to defend or promote national interests

I'm not saying they were the only ones, I am saying that they were one in a great cloud of witnesses that built the infrastructure by which the movement for black lives could be a 21st century. COFO [Council of Federated Organizations] right. This is not new work to us. This is, our inheritance, these people have been singing victory is ours to us since we were in the womb. That's where we are, the inheritors of a great legacy of work through SNCC. Where we understand that building the beloved community and the house that it will be living in will require lots of tools, lots of containers, lots of configurations, and multiple tactics, right? We are beyond the 20th-century beast between policy and organizing and direct action and recognizing that we need all three. We need some on top of that, right? That by any means necessary means by all the means.

It might not mean that I do it all, but it will mean that I might need to work in solidarity with folks who do the things that I don't know how to do or don't want to right. Then now is the time that we have to be building beyond individual interventions. That's not new to us either. SNCC taught us that even this weekend, you've heard from people who are working on voting rights. You've heard from elected. You've heard from the freedom singers, using culture as a way to do political education and to get us hyped up and ready for a continued fight, right?

You've heard from clergy, you've heard from saints and ain't, you've heard from folks that are building community through member-based, organizing. You've heard from capacity builders and political and popular educators. It's taking all of that to build the kind of movement that we can not only win with but sustain the wins with what we have to do at this moment where we are right now, I feel is relearning how to be human and doing that together.

How are we human as individuals and trying to have a human experience with other folks? How are we telling future stories, right? How are we building a narrative of what will be that includes us, right? Where we don't just have a narrative about how we were really good fighters, but we were really good winners, right? I feel like if we can, if we can be intentional about learning those lessons in this moment, if we could be disciplined and rigorous and study theory development and practice and information, and self-determination by all the means.

But recognizing that collectivity is what will get us that self-determination and defended. If we do those things, then our ability to live into a future story, a 50, 8,000-year strategy that we are behind in building comrades that we might fool around and realize that we deserve the power that we've built, that our people have given to us, that people sacrificed their lives and livelihoods for.

If we do it by studying SNCC, we can realize that not only is the South a critical aspect of how we build a liberated United States, but quite frankly, that the United States is a blip and the kind of international black solidarity movement building that we need to be doing. Right. SNCC wasn't just some folks that were doing work stateside, they were building relationships with black people, literally all over the world. That's what makes us powerful. That is our inheritance, and we aren't starting the attempt to build this 50, 60, 70 hundred-year strategy from scratch. We

have folks like Geri Augusto. We have folks like [Jennifer Lawson](#). We have folks like [Judy Richardson](#). We've got folks like [Courtland Cox](#) and [Charlie Cobb](#) and all of the greats. We've got ancestors like Sam Block and Bob Moses. With folks like that, I feel hopeful about this, this next question that drew that, I'm sure you're gonna ask us about, well, okay. If that's where we are, where, where are we going?

**Geri Augusto:** You've done it. You've answered all three of you have done both the here and the where, and we can take, we've got good time for questions if we have any from the audience. But, in the meantime, I've been listening, you should see my page. It's full of notes. This is like of the best too. Some of the best stuff that I've heard in the past months. So cogently and also how can I call it passionately expressed?

I think people need passion, too in a struggle like this, you gotta have passion. Otherwise, you can't keep going. But from my notes, I wanted to see if I could get you to reprise each of you and say some more about two things that I think a lot about. I think a lot of other people think a lot about me as an older person, even though I've been forced to learn how to work on work with Zoom. It was at a meeting probably not quite 10 years ago, but a long time ago where several people, this is before the Black Lives Matter movement, but younger people that we were meeting with in North Carolina, I think we were in Durham, in a hotel, locked in for a week with each other. This question was alive then.

It's the younger activists who pushed us. That was the night that all of us got Twitter accounts. Courtland[Cox] got one, I got one, you know, people had to point our fingers. And finally, somebody would just say, well, just gimme the phone and I'll set you up. Just give me the answers. I'll set you up, but there's a long-running discussion in the black community and other places, particularly among activists and organizers, younger and older about technology. So I'm one of those people, that's a technophobe and a techno file.

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

**Melina Abdullah:** Well, I'll just say this, technology is a wonderful tool. It's wonderful that as I'm also writing down notes, I'm like, let me tweet what Phil just said. It's wonderful to be able to do that. Right. It's wonderful to be able to put a call out and say we are meeting on Wednesday at four o'clock and we are meeting on Wednesday at four o'clock in front of the LA[Los Angeles] police protective league.

We're gonna say that police associations are organized crime. They are not unions, and thousands of people will see it in hundreds will show up. It's a wonderful tool. What happens when Instagram and Facebook go out because they did? One of the things that we have to remember is that it's a tool like a bulletin board is a tool, right? A phone is a tool. It is not the movement.

You can't replace the spirit that comes with this field, talked about sitting at feet; you can't replace that spirit with being on Instagram. That doesn't do it. So technology is useful. We don't own the technology. We don't run the technology. We can't stop technology from shutting down and we don't wanna lose the power of spirit and connection by over-reliance on technology.

I think the relationships can be enhanced through technology. We're doing it now. We're able to talk with each other now because of technology, and the meat of what we're saying and teaching, absorbing, and experiencing has to come through something beyond technology. It can't be technologically only our relationships can't be mediated through technology.

**Phil Agnew:** Yeah. True enough. To add to that WhatsApp, WhatsApp is all owned by the same people. When WhatsApp went down, we lost that connection. We don't have social media, but we can text, and to some degree, we couldn't do that. So to add to that, I think one fully agrees. It's a supplement to what we do. It's a microphone, but a microphone is nothing without the voice.

So I think we've gotten into a place in the last few years where we were placed where we think social media is the end and not the means. So what doctors are laying out is right on. I also think one of the dangers I'll add to the itinerary of dangers of technology, is the heavy surveillance. There, everything is not meant for public discourse.

I think we've gotten far too comfortable, naming exactly where we'll be and at what time we'll be there we've gotten far too comfortable, airing our inner quarrels with, uh, comrades or colleagues or people that we don't know on, on social media. We've gotten way too comfortable, airing out our inner insecurities.

I'm somebody who does that, these are forums that are consistently watched by our opposition, and the algorithms that they use to curate your timeline are very intentional, not just for you to buy. I think the consumerist part of it has been laid out in several studies, but also to monitor how you feel and what will be your reaction to certain things on any given day. I think we've got to be very cognizant of that.

The last thing I'll say on the negatives is there was a time and I know I've talked about this often I remember when [Rodney King](#) happened and Rodney King is seared into my memory to this day, I was seven years old. I saw it and I never thought I would see anything that brutal ever again. Now you see a Rodney King, every five minutes.

The impact of that on the psyche has been numbed. The rough parts of that have been smoothed over to the point where empathy and just the natural emotions that come upon you when you see someone be hurt or die have begun the atrophy in young people. Many of us couldn't, if we knew in 1992 that we would see a Rodney King every five minutes, that would be appalling to us, you know, that would be a dystopian future for anybody at that time, we're living in it. And so I think without real people in the real world that provide young people that provide our people with a very human counterpoint of foil, or even an affirmation to their engagement that they're having online, we're gonna be lost. And so we've got to use it as, as the doctor said, as a tool and not the end all be all.

**Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson:** Yeah. I think I remember Geri[Augusto] having a debate on stage at the SNCC digital gateway opening about this very question. It was me and Cleave sellers going toe to toe about the technology, and what I reminded my comrade Cleave was that technology by denotation, right by its actual, white man-given definition is just knowledge put into practical use to solve problems or invent useful tools. That's literally what technology is. So what that means is that technology existed when SNCC was born.

Technology was used by SNCC to talk to hundreds of thousands of people before the internet, but guess what? They used newsletters and mimeographs they used the press. They used letters there. Those were still technologies. And just like with social media, guess what those letters were intercepted and read by the state. Some white supremacists were monitoring the technologies that the SNCC used. It's not new stuff. Y'all SNCC would not have it would have been hilarious to sit in so many conference spaces and, hear Ella Baker telling [Bob Moses](#) and Ann Cleave, and [Diane Nash](#) and [John Lewis](#) and all these folks. It would've been hilarious to hear her say, you all just sending out those newsletters that that ain't organizing.

That's essentially the conversation we have in this 21st-century context about the tool of social media as one form of technology. I feel like it's important to say that because people make it seem like it's a brand new conversation and it's not technology that has existed for as long as humans have. I think the important piece that I would pluck is, is some of what my comrades already said.

Melina and Phil both mentioned that we do not own these platforms and not only do we not own the platforms, you all know that when we give our shit to them for free, they own that too. Right. So for all of the brilliant stuff that we're writing on Facebook and Twitter for all of the dynamic, sometimes problematic, but usually generative pace that we might be having on Twitter for all of the beautiful pictures of blackness that we put on Instagram for all of the conversations that are not archived somewhere and papers that we can control.

We can use them as lessons for the next generation of organizers, activists, freedom, fight, and folks on what's sad if, but if all of that disappeared, not only would we be in trouble because we don't own it, not only would we be in trouble because the state and white supremacists and others use it to surveil us folks that don't have the, the same, we desire to bend the moral arc of the universe towards justice. But like also we have given away literal way literally decades worth of

our brilliance to a platform that is not meant to be useful for us, that we've just figured out how to make useful for us. Y'all might remember Facebook was like a party app for college kids to hook up.

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

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

I've seen even worse. I've seen the right, knowing that we are not doing our due diligence, to create sound strategies and tactical interventions using social media and targeted articles to have us ripping each other apart because we didn't take the five minutes to see where did this information come from, who seated? That is where I fear the usage of those tools.

But regardless of that, I remember that there is a long legacy of, using technologies by, I think the world's greatest teacher, [Septima Clark](#), who taught hundreds of thousands, of black working-class people, not even just black, right, but a, a multiracial working-class before the internet. And before cell phones through these citizenship schools that supported movement building across the largest geographic region in the United States.

If Ms. Clark was innovative enough to be able to build something like that beyond the technologies of the 21st century, then imagine what would do stewardship. We might be able to do this if we were intentionally inclusive of those tools. I think that that gives us an opportunity. You know, Phil talked to you about how organizations are a vehicle for social transformation and that you don't get social transformation without organizations, right?

Technology is just another kind of tool and we need to be intentional about what are they for. Let me make it clearer. If I wanted to build a house, or if I wanted to fix a car, I wouldn't want a

toolbox that only had hammers in it. Right. Right. And the toolbox that I used to fix my car, wouldn't be the same toolbox that I used to build my house.

The toolbox that I used to build my house wouldn't be the same toolbox that I would use to fix my car. Right. So what do we, as movement, hopefully, movement scientists who are trying to movement alchemists that are trying to build a social movement, powerful enough to change all of the world's material conditions for the better, what would we need to study to be intentional about making sure we're using the right tools to build the thing that we're trying to build. Right. I fear that we don't spend enough time doing that. We just throw tactical spaghetti at the wall and hope that something sticks.

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

**Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson:** Preach Melina

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

What makes you trust them to fix the car? What makes you trust them to say, this is how we gonna move as we struggle to end qualified immunity. I'm not saying everybody shouldn't have a voice, but just as we used old technologies. We were, we would take there are people whose leaflets we take and people whose leaflets we throw in the trash, and we can't take everybody's leaflet, even if they have a blue check behind their name.

So I think it's really important to remember that as we think about new technologies, because Phil also, I think raised at stakes are high. You have folks who might even be well-intentioned or might not be whose credibility hasn't been as, or we haven't been as diligent in researching their credibility as we need to if we're going to allow them to work on our car or our house, or dictate a plan moving forward.

**Geri Augesto:** All right. On that note, it has continued like a thread about intentionality and some of the things that we need to do, including using technologies to help us do that. We have a question which doesn't seem to be addressed to any particular person. So each of you could comment let me see. We have probably three or four. Oh, we've got a lot. So let's see how many

we can get through question number one. And I'm sorry, I don't know who sent them because they're being put up by the tech team to see how we counteract the self-hatred and anti-human narratives that lead to internal violence, misogyny, patriarchy, and homophobia. As we move forward toward a multicultural, multiracial economic democracy, anyone.

**Phil Agnew:** I'll jump in, not as an expert, but as somebody who's struggling through this now with our organization with black men build as I stated, the goal of the organization is to organize and transform black men. Black men are not the only and are not the chief purveyors of misogyny, but our top five. The goal is to ensure that we have a space for black men to come to examine how misogyny, patriarchy, and the Western masculinity that we grew up under have affected our ability to be full human beings.

First with ourselves, to be able to navigate our inner worlds in a way that allows us to process with ourselves, to love ourselves, to see ourselves as human beings and worthy of full humanity and love and connection with other people to be able to receive and to give love, to be able to live lives of honesty, um, without shame and guilt.

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

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

**Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson:** I think Phil is being humble. Black Men Build got my baby brother to come to a mass meeting before any of my organizing did. So I think you'd be a humble comrade, and shout out to Black Men Build I'm biased, but I love them. Thank you. I think, to Phil's point, it's like we build movements. Like we build social clubs, I say that as a person; you heard me earlier using all the lefty jargon about discipline and rigor. I believe in that shit to my bones. I believe you need to be trained up underneath somebody that, that, that individuals are not annoyed at dental leadership. The communities choose all of that. But I also believe that the lesson of 2020 in particular was that when we get to a particular scale purity politics and perfectionism will be the enemy of the good right.

I think there are so many lessons from SNCC about this. It was like, they could have said all of the organizing that's happening in the sixties needs to be led and centered by us. And maybe some people in SNCC said that. But they also were like, all these people, one aren't gonna join SNCC and should, and two, they shouldn't all join SNCC. NAACP[National Association of the Advancement of Colored People] should, is gonna do what NAACP does. CORE[Congress of Racial Equality]LA is gonna do what CORE does. Right. All this they're gonna do what they do. What we need to know is what everybody's doing. Right. And figure out how the puzzle pieces fit. And so they build a council of federated organizations. and very similarly, again, I think we've, we've talked about the tools, but like the very containers then that hold people, that shift conditions.

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

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

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**Ash Lee Woodard Henderson:** We've conceded territory and then we go back into these neighborhoods, expecting people to just like, be down with us because we're Marx as feminist or something. That's not how organizing works. It's just not how organizing works. So I think, you know, what I would say is, that we need to be intentional about recognizing that to build the kind of beloved community that we want is a, it's a practice and that all of us, even the most woke, mess it up every day, that as a cis-gendered person, I am undoing transphobia every day.

It's I have to do it. I have to be accountable for it. I have to build a crew around me to hold me accountable to it so that I don't create harm against other folks. <sup>6</sup>Abolition is a practice, and

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<sup>6</sup> Abolition-the action or an act of abolishing a system, practice, or institution

feminism is a practice. It's not just a value statement. It's not just a theory in my brain that I agree with. It's something that I actively am either doing or not doing every second of the day. So what are we doing, to build these communities of practice, these containers for practice, where it's lower stakes, so that when we get into high stakes conversations and in high stakes moments whereby life is a queer black Southern woman from the working class, literally depends on the field, not being a patriarch, that when we, when it matters, we've practiced enough that he knows how to not be a patriarch. To me, that's the only way we get to live our values, to scale and create these other communities of practice where we can try that out. I think Black Men Build is one example of that. I think the movement for black lives is one example of that. I think Highlander has been a place where people get to practice that, uh, for almost 90 years now. And I think there's for every one of those examples, there's hundreds and hundreds and hundreds more.

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

**Melina Abdullah:** I think we have to move wherever we can. And so, as an educator, there's a reason that I'm in Pan-African studies. Ethnic studies are the only set of disciplines that comes from the community, not from a so-called ivory tower that we tie ourselves to community to black liberation. Black studies are tied to black liberation. So we must advance ethnic studies. People didn't understand why black lives matter.

One of our, the first pieces of legislation that we ever endorsed was an ethnic studies requirement in California. But when we think about the black power movement, the [black power movement](#) birthed ethnic studies, and ethnic studies continue to be tied to the black liberation struggle. So yes, we can use those spaces. In K through 12 education, we need to think about people like Cecil Lee Myers Cruz who's a member of black lives matter Los Angeles, and is also the president of United Teachers, Los Angeles.

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

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

**Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson:** I think there's so much to this is so hard.

**Geri Augusto:** Be brief

**Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson:** I think this is a moment of collective acceleration. My biggest recommendation would be to not sell ourselves short. Like we actually could win a lot over the next decade. If we make the demands that we deserve and not just what we would concede to. My encouragement would be for black folks, white folks, and other folks of color alike to fight for what we deserve to win, which is, abolition.

Which to me is anti-capitalist and is something better where people are put over profit, where we demand what our communities have always been requesting and building outside of a codependent relationship with the state. I hope that we go big over the next 10 years that we make some risks that we're innovative, and that we do it together with a multi-strategy across our issue areas and sectors and geographies. I think if we do what we might fool around and win.

**Geri Augusto:** All right, Melina

**Melina Abdullah:** I think that we need to all question our place in this movement moment. So I agree with what Ash-Lee is saying. What is your role in accelerating things? So join an organization as Phil is saying, you know, you can't do it as an individual. We need to all be organized, join an organization, and then wake up every morning and think about one thing we're gonna do for black freedom and do it. It can be a 60 second thing.

It can be your whole day, but do something every single day. You have to exercise that liberation muscle every single day. And we will have these accelerated and expansive win victories that are just coming and coming and coming. So 10 years from now, we're amazed at what we've accomplished.

**Geri Augusto:** Okay. And Phil,

**Phil Agnew:** I'm just agreeing and loving this. I...the only thing I would add, and people who know me as a Ludite will probably be like, what, but I would say technology is gonna offer us, a world of opportunities. I think the ability for us to move in the world with different economies,

different currencies. It's something that we should at least be interested in. I will not be a panacea, but in addition to all that says joining an organization, thinking, and dreaming big, I think the technological realm can afford us an opportunity.

And I don't think we can have a conversation without talking about [internationalism](#). So I would say over the next 10 years with technology, with our organizations, with dreaming bigs, we big, we should figure out, really what is gonna be our tactical and strategic alliances across the world across waters, because the opportunities there are rife and Africa as always is there is ready more than anywhere, and the opportunities there are bound.

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