MONDAY

21st CENTURY BLACK FEMINISMS

DEDICATION & THANK YOU

I want to extend my thanks to the Jacob Lawrence Gallery at the University of Washington and for the residency they awarded me with generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts. Their joint support allowed me to create the exhibition *A Book with No Pages* and the opportunity to edit and contribute to this issue of *Monday.* I also want to extend special thanks to Christa Bell for her sharp editorial insights as I completed the introduction.

It's been an honor to be in dialog and community with artists Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Christopher Paul Jordan, and Kimberly Crutcher, and writers Bryce Henson and Neesha Powell-Twagirumukiza. If there are "dark days" ahead, they all fill it with Black brilliance.

Jacob Lawrence Gallery director Emily Zimmerman's support and generosity aided this journey. Along the way, I have thought about and been grateful to have the painter, writer, and arts leader Barbara Earl Thomas as my mentor. Barbara helps keep Jacob Lawrence's legacy alive in her artistic practice, which is so vital and breathtaking. Knowing Barbara reminds me that when the world seems overtaken with cruelty and chaos that art remains a place to dream of restoration and transformation. Barbara's wisdom, stories, erudition, compassion, and general hilarity have seeded my roots in Seattle more than she knows and I can say.

Through a conversation with the polymath Christopher Paul Jordan, I learned recently that it took Black student organizing to bring Jacob Lawrence to the University of Washington, the only Black professor in the School of Art while Barbara was a painting student. UW is a place where honoring Lawrence's legacy as an artist remains coupled with freedom dreams about beauty, justice, society, and shared histories.

— C. Davida Ingram

CONTENTS

06 **C. Davida Ingram**
There is Prophecy in the Bark of a Dog: Sketches of Black Feminist Poetics

32 **Kimberly Crutcher**
Musings of Black Bear

38 **Alexis Pauline Gumbs**
black feminist metaphysics (aka breathing)

44 **Bryce Henson**
Marielle Presente: The Directionality of Black Feminist Praxis in the African Diaspora

56 **Neesha Powell-Twagirumukiza**
Why Black Art Is Inherently Political

66 **Christopher Paul Jordan**
Poems

74 **C. Davida Ingram**
C. Davida Ingram, Britta Johnson, and dk pan discuss When I Rub the Dead Skin of the Thing against Me I Find I am Soft, Brown and Human

THERE IS PROPHECY IN THE BARK OF A DOG: Sketches of Black Feminist Poetics

by C. Davida Ingram

For my mother Dr. Della Mae Weaver whose catechism of Black Love dwells deeply in my heart and Barbara Earl Thomas, Karen Toering, and Christa Bell for holding my dreams.

This collection of Black feminist essays for *Monday* has certainly been written at a "remarkable" time in the United States, as one of my mentors Valerie Garrett Turner would say. The possibilities for the Black feminist politics that Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Neesha Powell-Twagirumukiza, Kimberly Crutcher, Christopher Paul Jordan, and Bryce Henson present in this issue share approaches that are poetic but not prescriptive. I enjoy seeing their respective intellectual freeness and giftedness. Each of their ideas moves fluidly through space, time, and law. They furnish something that Black People have always done in the Diaspora, crafting codes for getting free. I see them as kindred, "cousins."

In a deeply fractured world it is important to remember that healing is always possible.

As Toni Cade Bambara wisely pointed out in her novel *The Salt Eaters*, there is "A lot of weight when you're well." I think healing in the United States comes from understanding Indigenous knowledge as a pathway to understanding the past, present, and future so that we can collectively imagine getting free. That's heavy stuff. True. But it's also light-filled, luminous.

In the United States, our truest first peoples have cared for the lands of this earth since time immemorial. Their versions

of love have sustained life for human, animal, plant, and water beings. They are Indigenous. I know. I see their healing in mine. A necessary wholeness.

For many, our deepest fears were realized upon the election of authoritarian racists in the United States in 2016. Living past that moment has taught me, I am still sacred even when I am scared. As this project was coming underway, a line from Luisah Teish's book *Jambalaya* kept catching my eye. Teish remembered that her mother once told her, "There's prophesy in the bark of a dog." Listening to that line conjures the scenes of police dogs attacking Black Civil Rights protestors in the 1960s, for me. The Black Civil Rights movement happened more than a decade before I was born. As I live through my early forties with a political force that was heretofore unimaginable to me, I am drawn towards the wisdom of Black women like Teish (and her mother) whose families survived the Jim Crow era in the South. I search through their life worlds because I am forced to understand, as they did, the ears that prick up when politicians suggestively dog whistle something racist. Dog is god spelled backwards. So, I try to keep my eyes peeled for the divine most days.

There are blood rights in memory and knowing. Indigenous knowledge is part of the feminist dream I have of Black Liberation.

Our new openly racist regime comes embodied via a septugenarian who is a reality TV star and unscrupulous businessman. The violent social policies Trump is enacting against Native Americans, African Americans, and immigrants of color who are Latinx, Muslim, and Cambodian among others, show that our 21st century cultural wars will remain treacherous. Our discernment will be needed. Trump's political platform was intentionally designed to make sure that economically disadvantaged Americans of all racial backgrounds could not see common ground together. The explicitly white supremacist framing means white people *never* have to see people of color as human or as sharing their economic class status, when we often do, though structural racism makes the hits we take from poverty harder.

I am sure it would have been laughable to me over twenty-years ago that George W. Bush would feel reasonable in the 21st Century. Back then I worked at Video Machete, a media center in Chicago that examined issues related to gentrification, police brutality, globalization, immigration, and displacement—the war on terror and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), among them. I have sat in disbelief as a white nationalist critique of neoliberal globalization that is twenty years too late and entirely self-serving unfolds.

Why did my activist crystal ball not see President Donald Trump coming? Now that this political trickster is tragically

true, I feel almost required to see past his chicanery so that white supremacy is not the only logical social reality I can see. Trump is a figurehead that makes no (good) sense, to me. Yet, I do understand very much that he has his currency from TV entertainment and gloves-off capitalism. He lies audaciously, acts vilely, speaks vulgarly, and demands violence and abuse at every turn. He very much also calls to mind the PT Barnum quip, "Nobody ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the American people".

US racism has always been about white profiteering.

Donald Trump's shibboleth to white liberal democracy was invoking violent racism to "Make America Great Again." Undoing Trump's call-to-action leaves space to call in what is darkly feminine as a counterpoint. Black Feminist dreaming at this point in the story can be about configuring our godhead in a philosophical, historical, tactical, and spiritual way. The primary point that I want to suggest is: *When Black Feminist liberation honors Indigenous decolonizing, that is when healing truly begins in America.* They both are needed—Indigenous decolonizing and Black liberation—to truly see the greatness of America.

But how?

Let's look at gender. In the presidential election, the majority of white women in this country—53%—voted for Trump. In contrast, 94% of Black women voted against him. These election statistics on women voters are binary, but they bear out in ways that both haunt and hearten me, as a Black feminist thinker. On one hand they show that white feminism has a poor batting average. On the other, the election polls also show that Black Feminist thought in America can be a saving grace. Through its radical imagination and its emotional and intellectual capacities, Black Feminist thought creates philosophical and tactical strategies to see imminent danger and to plot agency along different stress points imaginatively and sociologically.[1]

The Black electorate had very tough choices in the 2016 presidential election. As the Democratic contender, Hillary Clinton had already shown a devastating disregard for working class Black people. The policies that she supported in the 1980s and 90s led to the overincarceration of Black children, women, and men. Children were ripped from their families because they or their mothers, fathers, or other caregivers were thrown into cages—most for non-violent offenses. Clinton's lack of overt racial solidarity is of course belied by her bourgeois politeness. While she may not have ever used the word "nigger" publicly—and would likely cringe at the thought of ever doing so—her policies are like an epithet. Said differently, she fought for laws that eventually harmed Native, Black, and Brown communities; racism as such is very much part of her politic. Yet, Clinton lost to Trump because white America

is still addicted to patriarchy tied to white supremacy and the aesthetics of "power over," but never held power collectively. Though she was culpable for racist policy, it was Trump who was willing to call out racism as something beneficial for whites. So, the white electorate chose the candidate that catered to their racist fancy, clearly putting people of color in harm's way. In this era of virulent white supremacy, Black Feminism acts as an antidote for such hubris, and against a centrifugal politics that throws us away from one another instead of establishing accountability and common ground.

Race is a house that is invaded. We can understand Blackness mostly by asking how our arrival affects the original inhabitants—the Indigenous people of Turtle Island. Because we are going to need one another to get out of this burning house alive.

America's seemingly endless foray into white supremacy and patriarchy looks both desperate and rapacious under Trump's aegis. He ran under a regressive "law and order" platform that dog whistled that it was ok now to dehumanize anyone who was not white. Under the mantra "Make America Great Again" (MAGA), right-wing ideologues are now ramping up new challenges to Native sovereignty in the courts.[2] In fact, a Native American activist named Michael "Little Feather" Giron[3], who was part of the Standing Rock water protectors, has already been sentenced to 3-years in prison, which is a travesty of justice (and these pipelines are coming to the Salish Sea). During this time, the number of Black people murdered by the police has continued to mount, 91 Black people have been killed so far this year.[4] Trump has continued to insult Black athletes, even though they are symbols of American prowess. He called Black football players "sons of bitches" when they have knelt in protest against police killings as the national anthem plays.

When we understand the impunity with which whiteness has first treated Native and Black communities over U.S. history, it gives the criminalizing of immigrants of color, especially those who are Latinx and from Muslim majority countries, a more chilling effect. Trumpian xenophobia has set the stage for obscenely stealing Latinx children away from their families when they come to the U.S. border seeking asylum. This is reminiscent of slave auctions and Indian boarding schools. Private prisons are cashing in on immigrant detention in the same ways that they have for mass incarceration, which hits Native American and Black communities hardest, respectively. At the time of this writing, small babies whose families have been caught crossing the border have now stopped being placed in the Orwellian-sounding "Tender Age" camps. But now these children can be fostered out to strangers in US cities (while their caregivers still search for them) or if they are less unlucky, indefinitely detained

with their adult family members in immigrant camps. Under U.N. law, seeking asylum is not a crime. Somehow in this dogged version of America, asylum seekers can now be held hostage— that is, until Trump receives the border wall his regime maniacally demands. The U.S. has also just the left the U.N. Council on Human Rights.[5]

So far, loud public outcries and the judiciary have at times kept part of the MAGA agenda at bay. These successful defenses—and their costs—show that we are fighting a force that is ill-thought, under-planned and yet still diabolical. It seems to make perfect sense that such violence would be wasteful of taxpayer monies and threatening to human rights and civil liberties. For example, Trump's Muslim ban has been attempted at least three times, with the supreme court upholding the euphemistically called "travel ban" in a 5-4 decision that shows the impact of the conservative court. It's also quite clear the Trump administration keeps planning to be more demeaning and demented to those he despises because they are not wealthy or white.

Speaking historically and chronologically, the Native American holocaust is followed by the holocaust of African peoples in the transatlantic slave trades. In the U.S., when white people first attack what is Indigenous, it warns that the next volley will then be against Blackness. Then the pattern continues, like a moiré. America ripped Indigenous and Black peoples from their lands and roots. We are made to be fugitive. Black people live in this country by the grace of Indigenous people who host us as they endure. I worry sometimes that an unnecessary shame at the ways in which we, as different peoples, have been raped by whiteness keeps Native Americans and African Americans from collectively saying to one another #MeToo and to whiteness #TimesUp.[6] Experiencing horrific violence does not at all change our intrinsic worth or value. So, it becomes important for us to countenance—that is to fully face— America's white supremacist patriarchy in kinship with one another, centering ourselves. Confronting such violence traumatizes us but also conversely asks us to confront such violence in order to build new foundations for ourselves, giving birth to a new and regenerative national narrative. When immigrants of color arrive in the United States, often because of our country's violence, they can learn how to survive from our joint catechism. Our resistance movements have been in place since our peoples first encountered white invaders who sought to kidnap, kill, rape, and imprison us.

Seeing the mirror of what is happening in American society requires a Black Feminist forensic. The cultural exercise underway in this collection of essays and poems is decidedly about examining 21st Century Black Feminisms in a way that is intentionally agile, fluid, poetic. You will find that this is not an assay that is overly invested in historicizing in a

Eurocentric way. Neesha Powell-Twagirumukiza does a very deft job of moving through Black cultural production across many different decades in their essay. Powell also reminds us, as they invoke Nina Simone, that the artist's duty is to "reflect the times." When Black feminists, like Powell, take leaps, and zigzag between many different times that are interconnected, they help show us how the pale shadow of whiteness rises as oppression and how Blackness as brilliance pierces it, like a beacon.

The artist Christopher Paul Jordan tells us, "Where you at is where it's at," and part of the investigation here is a deeper exploration of Black psyches so we can more cogently reckon with histories of violence in America. This inquiry is a chance to see what is changed when Black feminist agency shows up with its wisdom, beauty, courage, and fierceness. On the notion of being alive in a wildly dangerous landscape where to be Other is to be hunted, Kimberly Crutcher enjoins her reader "to be a wolf." Likewise, Bryce Henson persuades us to be tenderly fierce in our understanding of the impact of Brazilian human rights activist Marielle Franco's death, and how her legacy indeed lives on past the real moment of despair at her loss. Marielle is ever-present because of the 500-year history of global Black Liberation movements in the Americas and the real humanity she held.

When Alexis Pauline Gumbs makes maps for these territories of resistance, she points out that under white supremacy and dominion, "they had a thing about darkness" and before that she also reminds us "one body was not a sustainable unit for the project at hand." After she points us to plurality and she also signals the time of the "Black oceanists" that takes us to the deeps is upon us. Gumbs takes us to the water's edge, where a cosmological depth unfolds Blackness as a very old sense of being human.

#SayHerName. People of color often have to take an Atlas-like stance to hold the psychic weight of whiteness in blue states and cities in America, just like red ones but different. I see this in Seattle. Though it is brutally unwieldy, the phallocentrism of white supremacy in Seattle rarely shows itself fully erect. Instead, it tends to be a whiff of suggestion in the air that things may be not quite right racially speaking. Every now and again there is a gap in the clouds, though. On June 15 in Seattle, a burly white man named Steven Jay Watts stood loudly yelling at passersby in Beacon Hill that "niggers" needed to leave because "white men built this country" and "we're going to bury you people." A video of Watts later went viral. I find it ironic that Bryce Henson partially wrote his essay "Marielle Presente" across the street from where Watts had his tantrum at the Station coffee house. This beloved local gathering place owned by a Black woman named Leona Moore-Rodrigeuz and her husband Luis Rodriguez. When Americans catch white people acting

out, as Watts did, the "offender" tends to enter a pubic stockade for ridicule and scapegoating even though America is clearly based on white racism. No amount of shaming of white supremacy for being vulgar will bring a Black person back to life.

#SayHerName. Marielle Franco's activism on behalf of the sanctity of Black life in Brazil resonates with the politics of Black Lives Matter in the U.S. Franco's light raises her up from the dead because she is tied to a very very long legacy of resistance that will never die; it comes from a righteousness that illuminates the human soul. *That* creates eternal remembrance. May her memory stay connected with her slain sisters in the U.S. like Sandra Bland and Charleena Lyles. May their memories always live. #SayHerName.

Because whiteness exists as it does in America, meaning rapaciously and murderously, abolition becomes a way of creating a critical understanding of how we can confront the essential criminality that informs the making of whiteness in the U.S. The continuation of white settler colonialism means that we cannot and will not have communities that are healthy enough to guarantee safety for those who need it most. Native, Black, and immigrant communities of color and especially those of us who are disabled, gender diverse, no-to-low income, undocumented, chronically ill, and old and/or young are made most vulnerable under the tenets of racist capitalism. Yet, we also tend to have access to the most

justice through the aegis of Black Feminism organizing principles. We see that in Tarana Burke's #MeToo movement, #BlackLivesMatter, Critical Resistance, Women of Color Against Violence, and beyond. We see this in the activism of Therese Patricia Okoumou, the Congolese immigrant rights leader, who scaled the Statue of Liberty this July 4th to point out the inhumanity of the U.S. government interning children and infants.

This is to say, Black Feminism talks back and talks sense. When Therese Patricia Okoumou scaled the foor of Lady Liberty, her t-shirt read: White supremacy is terrorism. It is arguable that Black feminism in the U.S. is most powerful when it is allied with Indigeneity while showing the plurality and beauty of Blackness, meaning the full spectrum of humanity, in all of its colors, phenotypes, and forms. Like many cisgender and transgender women and non-binary people, I am a survivor of sexual violence in my communities of origin and practice. As a Black Feminist, I believe that holding a belief in radical humanity and an ethics of love creates a space to move beyond rape culture while also understanding that rapists are *not* a state of exception but rather that they are the natural outcome of rape culture. White supremacy is rape culture writ large. The 21st Century Black Feminist Project is redemptive in that it knows, in an abolitionist way, that that which is criminal is not necessarily evil until it avowedly avoids the work of repair and sees itself as beyond reproach,

until it walks in and calls men kneeling in protest of Black death "sons of bitches," puts infants in cages, or shouts it is going to "bury us." Then we know.

In the United States, white supremacy has sought to steal so much from our dark femininities—our land, memories, stories, bodies, self-esteem, children. sovereignty, autonomy, and most of all our souls. Like Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*, Black feminists are masterful storytellers. Our voices become a reckoning. Black feminists *must* successfully tell our stories so all of us can get our motherloving lives back. And we do this *every* day. We weave our stories into plot twists that keep our oppressive husbands, boyfriends, brothers, and fathers from killing us by night's end. We know we must change the story's ending. Black transgender women's lives are too painfully short and too many Native American women are raped and abducted to be unsure.

Social relationships are a centerpiece of Black feminist thought. The welcome table. As such, this catechism encourages us to deeply care about one another. Decolonizing and liberation are modes of thought and a structure of feeling that are simultaneously required to see our fuller humanity. As such, Black Feminism creates space for seeing feminine agency as a necessary way of knowing, being, and doing in a colonizer's world that displaces us from our own bodies, from our own narratives, from the ocular realm, from meaningful and necessary social positions. The colonizer's mind leaves in its wake the vile version of masculinity that revolves around acquisition and violation, and the version of femininity that exists in such patriarchy that is racist of itself and through its outcomes. Until we transform them.

As a Black feminist in the U.S., I must learn to be comfortable with surviving in the dark unknown—not because it necessarily loves me. It can be agnostic about that. However, to the extent that darkness is feared, I too am feared. Darkness, then, must become familiar and human to me but also still separate from me, lest I too become a colonizer, meaning someone who cannot allow differences and boundaries to exist without wrongfully annexing them. Blackness, then, becomes a reaction to light at a surface and cosmological level (e.g. darkening) and paradoxically the absence of light, too, from an exterior view in terms of spaces that are new or unknown, or in or beyond the pale (e.g. dark, white, or absent of wisdom or light). Blackness also coincides with animal natures, the wild, sepulchral mounds that bury or hide death, or whatever else may come out of the void—meaning, all that *cannot* be controlled. Because we are human and striving to live in harmony with our social relationships and environment, such things do not unwind us when we are strong in both our sense of Indigeneity, Blackness, and womanhood or whatever engenders us to be simply be feminine, life-giving.

Kimberly Crutcher puts it much more sublimely:
And you will remind your girl she is a mother, fierce and strong. No one can sing her song or fight as long. Tell her to never become a scavenger just because someone feels safer when she betrays her nature. Tell her the difference between what she was born to be and what a dog is trained to do.

Like our Native American sisters, Black women have always had to outthink the white colonizer's logic. Our bodies, psyches, and families (blood and chosen) are where the game of oppression is played. This has been the same and sometimes worse for our Indigenous sisters. This is why Indigenous and Black feminisms furnish the critiques of white supremacy and patriarchy with the cogency that they do. For oppressed people in the U.S., our critical consciousness provides a folkway.

The territory of the battle remains fraught, though.

Non-binary, transgender, and cisgender Indigenous and Black women can listen to Sojourner Truth's question, "Aint I Woman?" and understand that the respective femininities we embody (or not) are plural but never protected in white supremacy and patriarchy. Femininity can easily be made subsidiary to the low-minded desires of men who fear their mothers, the women and genders they cannot control, and how they feel about the uselessness or utility of their masculinity and prowess—the presence or absence of phallic power. Indigenous and Black feminisms provide space for us to consider how our new and existing femininities can be empowered to challenge white supremacy, the savagery of capitalism, and patriarchy so that their very mechanisms cannot stay intact. We must be plural and we know intrinsically that our oppressions are intersecting, too. That is to say, Black feminisms are queer even when they anticipate that most of the women who we seek to provide safe harbor to may identify as cisgender and straight. Under white supremacy, a white woman is to be valued because she is a sex object and an Indigenous or Black woman is to be devalued because she is a sex object. An archaic way to say a woman was sexually violated was to say she was ravished. In white capitalist racism, all women and non-binary people are told they must be ravishingly beautiful, under an ideal that we can't meet. We'll be strewn out however we dance to that tune, but race and gender expression will dictate just how demeaning the ritual punishment will be.

We know the colonizers cannot have us. Not ever. And not certainly.

When we resolutely show up—round nosed, short, large, fat, slender or bulging, hairy or hairless, dark of eye and skin, and in devout memory of all that our beginnings have held—which is to say as our Black and ever-loving selves—resistance is birthed. The average white person

would have to struggle long and hard to understand that no Black woman would ever really want to be equal to the oppressors who have killed, raped, and kidnapped her ancestors. Her siblings. Her babies. Her lovers. Whiteness can never be *her* equal, with things as they are, meaning without truth and reconciliation in this relationship. This concept is not so difficult to understand. Black people who are feminine tend to understand it on a soul level. Because of this deep awareness, in Black Feminism, white supremacy is a misnomer, an inferior system that replaces humanity with a color-coded society that dehumanizes everyone who participates in it. White people tend to be the last to see how disastrous their way of life has been both for the natural environment and the human spirit, and most of all for themselves. And yet, Black women have long known that we will be there to look them in the eye levelly when that reckoning is finally made.

In Black Feminist imaginaries, the people, the folk, are alchemized to a greater humanity because we weave our love and care into shared histories. It is our fealty to creating life worlds that work in balance with our natural, physical, spiritual, and psychic environments that makes our politics generous, forward-thinking, vital.

Poetics, oratory, and skillfully designing tactical political, cultural, and social strategies to be free of oppression are a defining feature of Indigeneity and Blackness in America. Our futures are indeed feminine and deeply intertwined with one another.

When I argue that whiteness is based on criminality, that it veritably breaks sacred laws about the body, psyche, spirit, along with those that govern physical and emotional safety, what stands there in plain sight, as a result of this violation, are the millions of Native American, Black, and Brown bodies that sit in cemeteries, prisons, and internal sorrows because of the lies that whiteness tells itself about humanity—both ours and theirs. We will all be free as a society when we can look at our shared humanity, all of it—the beauty and the terror that being human can hold—and bring it back into balance. There are many compensatory things that white people do to feel better about themselves, by ignoring the past. Black Feminism can never be one of them. That is a grace.

Humanities are the lifelines of Black life, including our oral traditions, storytelling, literature, visual art, music, science, politics, and athletics—each of which has been greatly improved by Black femmes in all of our shapes, sizes, colors, forms, and pluralities. White Americans may sometimes hate Black people because we dare to imagine our precious selves whole without paying whiteness any mind. Blackness is a relational sign system that allows us to see what whiteness is up to. It is a spiritual litmus. Black Feminism is a rebirthing process that honors the womb, including those who never had wombs, and those

who no longer have wombs, while also knowing organs are not all of what make 'women' women. It allows us to understand the energetic and psychic drives and spirit that imbue femininity (sometimes alongside of biology and sometimes not). It leaves spaces for understanding and treasuring womanhood and to see dark femininities as being richly arrayed and part of understanding what our essential and numinous natures mean.

When we, as Indigenous and Black people, euphemistically use words like equity now, I tend to think it is because we are rightfully keeping time. Holding ancestral rhythms, Scheherazade-like, changing the plot.

It could be argued that white people tend to become murderous whenever Native and Black people gently suggest to them that they heal. This version of berserking is likely Indigenous to the colonization of Europe that burned the so-called witches and killed the Black Madonna in the white soul (e.g. trauma). This brings me back to my thesis, and it may bear repeating, *when Black Feminist liberation meets with Indigenous decolonizing, healing rightfully begins.* This joint recuperation requires us to face human histories in such a way that we truly begin to understand how the nation of America is birthed because Indigeneity and Blackness survived the terrorism of whiteness. Healing requires understanding that white people became less than human at our expense. That is the great American story, the

needed plot twist that our 45th President has began.

Black joy, as Stuart Hall would say, flashes up in a moment of danger. We know that Black feminisms challenge capitalistic systems. They recognize the criminality that allowed whiteness to try to magically transform our ancestors into commodities, and Indigenous people and lands into the doctrine of discovery. A white house built on Indigenous land will always crumble iniquitously. It will not stand. I live on Indigenous land. I intend to live and to love in communities, here, with Indigenous and Black peoples, as well as other exiles of the U.S. project who come here to be free because we see our lives and liberation as intertwined and ever-present in our hearts, minds, and as our ancestors wished. With Life. In Love. And Glory.

When other communities of color, houseless people, and the dispossessed of any color can examine closely with Indigenous and African American peoples how the white colonial project has always functioned in the United States through terrors that include rape, murder, kidnapping, and imprisonment, we *all* can finally do that work of mending. Together.

Healing is what gets us free.

When they come in the morning with oppression and injustices, we know the human spirit of what is both Black and Indigenous will get us safely through the night.

POSTSCRIPT On 21st Century Naming Conventions . . .

If my soul becomes
a list poem, come,
hold me, remind me of
the nerves lacing my
skin—not simply its
color. Remind me that
there is red flesh
beating underneath the
curve of my rib—the
song it sings: holy.
Remind me that
my skin was painted
once with loam, eggshell,
cinnamon, tumeric,
small amounts of honey,
persimmon peels, dawns
and dust. Remind me
that the Goddess was
chewing chitin
when she made
my hair and inked its
helix and coil
into the color
of wet bark.
Remind me the
sepia leaf print of
my palm is second
cousin to the maple
tree. Remind me that
soul is ineffable.
Yet, I still might
try to get my mouth
around its stump
vowels and its humpback
consonants to create
wonder or horror
depending on the bell,
the trumpet, the
wasp nest of my
eardrum that hears
me wishing myself
aloud. Remind me
that the lists I make
of what I am say:
Nothing. It is not my
love trying to remember
me half full. And who?
That is what
a human being
is. And inquiry.
A quandary.
An answer that
responds back
with more questions
full. Never forget
that. The point
is to know,
to feel, not
describe.

NOTES

1. I am also keeping in mind many Black people refused to vote in US elections because endorsing a racist system that is historically violent is anathema to them.

2. This has been happening in both Democratic and Republican parties as can be seen in Washington State with Attorney General Bob Ferguson. https://lastrealindians.com/the-not-so-strange-bedfellows-of-anti-indianism-bob-ferguson-the-citizens-equal-rights-alliance-and-settler-colonialism-part-1/

3. ATF Press release https://www.atf.gov/news/pr/new-mexico-man-sentenced-civil-disorder-during-dakota-access-pipeline-dapl-project-protest

4. Washington Post data on police killings: https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/national/police-shootings-2018/?utm_term=.ab5d6b25d55b

5. Gardiner Harris, "Trump Administration Withdraws U.S. From U.N. Human Rights Council," (June 19, 2018) https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/19/us/politics/trump-israel-palestinians-human-rights.html

6. What I do not mean to imply is that Native Americans and African Americans are not actively fighting white supremacy. However, it is rare to see us organizing in tandem.

MUSINGS OF BLACK BEAR

by Kimberly Crutcher

I.
Do you remember the law of the jungle?
Crude rule of endless war, a cumbersome judicial
Constantly amended with change of allegiance
And warnings of eat or be eaten? With a poet's mouth
You had neither tooth nor stomach for survival.
No mind to study war or to earn street cred
No eyes to see in a constant canopy of darkness.
You went, a refugee from the city to the country.
Four years to learn and earn some degree of understanding
Lessons on migration, on starlight, on taking
The girl outta the city. Getting lost in the woods,
Running parallel with the border fence
And finally, finally finding a home in the wild.

Then, when you're back in the metropolis with wild
Lessons on rhythm, on death, on resurrection
Of the fallen. When you return to the towers and
Make kin of roosting hawks and hooligans
You call the bird tribes 'brother' when you're on the fly.
Holding the wisdom of the country in the city recall
What the cedars said to a shy city girl
Is the secret of how to stay grounded.

II.
One spring morning you woke up
And by the wind and the weather you knew
Someone had let the wolf in.

Forsaking fear of the foreign
You looked forward to the new blood.
It had been too long since you'd had a friend at your table.
No one to come over and break bones with you;
No one to chop it up with since the last big cat
wandered over the ridge. And now, the wolf
being back, would want to share a meal.
Surely.
(For back in the day y'all used to play. Before they drove them away there was no territory bound by laws that block migration. Gray Wolf and Black Bear used to share the wilderness, the wild, and the way of moving as a tide.)

Time was it was you, the only predator left in the woods.
Not a killer truly, but a bit of an opportunist
And a fighter for personal space and family safety.
(For the ones who think your children are cute will kill you; so, you fight to keep your own.)
And you were a big sleeper; solitary dreamer, omnivorous Bear, deeply aware
That you would be blamed and shamed and disclaimed
Even if you stayed in your margins.

But now the Big and the Bad are back in the region!
It will take them eight seasons to bring back the green and the reason.
Back into balance will come the whole system, for the Big and the Bad caused the cascade.

So
The deer told the valley, the valley told the stream, the stream told the flowers, the flowers told the bees, the bees told the birds, and the birds told the trees, the trees told the weather, and the weather told the heather, and the roses and the nettles to keep making flower petals for the fruit is in its bud and the Earth is so in love with the summer and the sun. With the summer and the sun, cause the wolf is on the prairie, all the fields are filled with fairies, cause the wolf is back.
The wolf is back!
Some summer evening you'll sit down together over caribou and human camper cast off stew. You'll tell the wolf what you know of being maligned and feared. You'll share stories of being misunderstood, of being eroticized for being so exotic; of being mythologized then criminalized and then killed.
"It happened before," the wolf will say.
"It can happen again," you will agree.
And you will remind your girl she is a mother, fierce and strong. No one can sing her song or fight as long. Tell her to never become a scavenger just because someone feels safer when she betrays her nature. Tell her the difference between what she was born to be and what a dog is trained to do. Yes, you remind her to never become a scavenger. You will tell her to hunt like her life depends on it; hunt wolf you'll say; all our lives depend on it.

III.

Recurring dreams of wolves:
There is this one: a young girl with a young soul
didn't believe wolves would be out in the woods when she was out in the woods.
And she was out, dressed in blood like field meat, picking flowers for decorative purposes. And then,
She got chased by a wolf!
And she ran to you like you wouldn't eat her; like you wouldn't maul her, like you were tamed now — just because you stand on your hind legs, eat porridge and sleep in a too soft bed; just because a white man put a skirt on you, a hat on you; had you hold an umbrella and dance…
She ran to you because she believes she doesn't have to be what she was born, so why would you stay wild and grizzly?
Being so near the branch of humanity you gave her succor and the milk of truth.
In this dream, you put on her grandmother's silk night bonnet and you tell her, "real natural nature has wolves in it. You tell her that the predators are part of the world. The fast and the strong survive; the weak give it up. They give up their whole bodies, their whole selves, to be reborn as wolves themselves."
"You are not white," you remind her.
"No one is, not really. And so as a brown person; a person native to somewhere — if not this place, then you'd better know — even if you can't remember — that everything dies. Including you. And everyone kills; including you."
You laugh at her when she says she's a vegetarian. You tell her that without the wolf everything goes out of balance.
You slap her face.
You tell her plants communicate. Yarrow waits for the ground to invite it back to grow; pecan trees, call other pecan trees miles and miles away and so they can all bloom together.
You tell her that everything is somebody. You tell her.
"Everything is related to its own family; everything is related to you. Everything is alive; conscious. You are not white. No one is, not really. And so as a brown person you better remember that broccoli and lettuce and tomatoes, strawberries, spinach, pole beans, squash — every vegetable, nut, seed, grass that you lift to your lips is somebody.
You slap her again and her blond curls bounce
as she begins to cry, and you tell her,
"Your death will not prove your innocence. Your fear will not buy your safety."
You put a paw on her hand, a paw on her cheek; she shudders and you tell her
"You be the wolf."

black feminist metaphysics (aka breathing)[1]

by Alexis Pauline Gumbs

i.

this thing about one body. it was the black feminist metaphysicians who first said it wouldn't be enough. never had been enough. was not the actual scale of breathing. they were the controversial priestesses who came out and said it in a way that people could understand (which is the same as saying they were the ones who said it in a way that the foolish would ignore, and then complain about and then co-opt without ever mentioning the black feminist metaphysicians again, like with intersectionality, but that's another apocalypse).

the Lorde of their understanding had taught them. *this work began before I was born and it will continue . . .*

the university taught them through its selective genocide. one body. the unitary body. one body was not a sustainable unit for the project at hand. the project itself being black feminist metaphysics. which is to say, breathing.

hindsight is everything (and also one of the key reasons that the individual body is not a workable unit of impact), but if the bio-chemists had diverted their energy towards this type of theoretical antioxidant around the time of the explicit emergence of this idea (let's say the end of the second-to-last century), everything could have been different. if the environmentalists sampling the ozone

had factored this in, the possibilities would have expanded exponentially.

that wouldn't have happened (and of course we see that it didn't) because of the primary incompatibility. the constitutive element of individualism being adverse, if not antithetical to the dark feminine, which is to say, everything.

to put it in tweetable terms, they believed they had to hate black women in order to be themselves. even many of the black women believed it sometimes. (which is also to say that some of the people on the planet believed they themselves were actually other than black women. which was a false and impossible belief about origin. they were all, in their origin, maintenance, and measure of survival more parts black woman than anything else.) it was like saying they were no parts water. (which they must have also believed. you can see what they did to the water.)

the problematic core construct was that in order to be sane, which is to live in one body, which is to live one lifetime at one time, which is to disconnect from the black simultaneity of the universe, you could and must deny black femininity. and somehow breathe. the fundamental fallacy being (obvious now. obscured at the time.) that there is no separation from the black simultaneity of the universe also known as everything also known as the black feminist pragmatic intergenerational sphere. everything is everything.

they thought escaping the dark feminine was the only way to earn breathing room in this life. they were wrong.

you can have breathing and the reality of the radical black porousness of love (aka black feminist metaphysics aka us all of us, *us*) or you cannot. there is only both or neither. there is no either or. there is no this or that. there is only all.

this was their downfall. they hated the black women who were themselves. a suicidal form of genocide. so that was it. they could only make the planet unbreathable.[2]

ii.

they had this thing about darkness. the bottom of the ocean, outer space. they were afraid of it, they wanted to penetrate it. they wanted to pretend it only existed in contrast to light. and there was something about not wanting to have their eyes closed. not wanting to go within. lightweight enlightenment equaled mass black death. so through the accidents of scholarships, the trickle-down of diversity funding, and the calling from spirit that was before and behind and up under all of that, the black oceanists emerged. and the black oceanists trained themselves and each other not to be afraid of going black (that was what they called it) for days at a time. they were not afraid to slow and evolve their breathing. they were not afraid of their kinship with bottom crawlers who could or could not glow. they were not afraid of being

touched by what they could never see, never bring back to the light, never have a witness for.

or to be more precise. they knew about that already. and they were less afraid of the underwater unknown than they were of the blatant dangers up on land.

so the second skin they put on to dive was thick and black, but not quite as thick, nowhere near as constricting as what they already knew.

they showed each other their teeth. drunk and daring on what the unknowable would teach them. and it was not long before they started to long for longer, to plan for a plan that would sustain generations below. depth of a plan that didn't require, include, value, or chart a return to the surface ever again.[3]

NOTES

1. This is an excerpt from "The Lab Notebooks of the Last Experiments" in *M Archive: After the End of the World* by Alexis Pauline Gumbs (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018)

2. "Being everywhere was the only way," in P*edagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* by M. Jacqui Alexander. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.)

3. "No one knows the mysteries at the bottom of the ocean," in *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* by M. Jacqui Alexander. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.)

MARIELLE PRESENTE:
The Directionality Of Black Feminist Praxis In The African Diaspora

by Bryce Henson

On March 13, 2018, Rio de Janeiro councilwoman Marielle Franco took to Twitter to ask the obvious: "How many more will have to die for this war to end?" The 38-year-old Black feminist, human rights activist, favela resident, lesbian, and mother went where she was not supposed to be but necessarily where she needed to be. She responded to the death of Matheus Melo, a poor 23-year-old Black man, at the hands of the notoriously lethal Military Police. Melo's death is not an isolated incident in Rio de Janeiro or anywhere in Brazil. Rather, it is part of a larger genocidal project against Brazil's approximately 50% Black population where Black male youth are disproportionately victims of state-sanctioned violence (see Vargas, 2010). Black women are also suspect to various forms of state surveillance, gratuitous violence, structural vulnerability, sexual stigmatization, and social inspection that impede on their life chances as well (Caldwell, 2006, 2017; Perry, 2013; Santana, 2017; C. Smith, 2014, 2016; Williams, 2013). And yet, Franco dared to make explicit this war on Black people and then question its function in a democratic polity. To be blunt, she went there.

A tireless advocate for those most marginalized in Latin America's largest nation, Franco has long advocated for Blacks, Indigenous peoples, the poor, women, queer folx, and favela residents. The next day, she attended the workshop "Young Black Women Moving Structures." As she left, she and her driver, Anderson Pedro Gomes, were executed

by two men in another car, shooting at them nine times, four of which pierced Franco's body. At the time of this writing, investigators have yet to name a suspect. This was to inform her that she went too far as well as to warn others about the consequences of also going there.

Since then, Franco's absence has become ever more noticeable. She is seemingly everywhere. From social media to community organizing to collective statements, the phrase "Marielle Presente" continues to occupy spaces in the wake of her death, amplifying her political work and political assassination in ways unforeseen. Her politics, social identities, and everlasting desire for equity and justice for those most vulnerable have taken on a new life and pushed into new directions that were not intended. The death of Franco did not impede her life's work. It went on to take a new direction and circulate in ways that her killers never imagined. Others also want to go there and disrupt how they are not supposed to be there with and through Franco.

I want to briefly examine how Franco's life, death, and now life in death inform our understandings of Black feminism as a praxis of directionality, going to places unintended for Black people; destabilizing spaces antithetical to Black people, Blackness, and Black feminism; and transforming them to expand our conceptions of what is Black. Franco was but one in a long line of Black Brazilian feminists who theorize and advocate for Black freedom and liberation (Gonzalez, 1984; Nascimento, 1985; Ratts, 2005; C. Smith, 2016). They challenge Brazil's culture of antiblack racism and sexism that police, subjugate, and marginalize Black women while making their lives disposable. This is part of a larger Afro-diasporic condition grounded in racial and gender sociopolitical hierarchies (T. R. Patterson & Kelley, 2000). At the same time, the African diaspora is a process shaped by processes of migration, movement, political thought, organization, and cultural production. Black women have been more than fundamental to diasporic processes and politics (C. Davies, 2008, 2009; McDuffie, 2016; U. Taylor, 2002, 2017). They have explicitly called attention to those sisters outside the Black mainstream, but also outside the conventions of gender, sexuality, and family. It is nothing short of a revolution of love and a recalibration of the politics of care by embracing Blackness in all the places it is not supposed to be in.

What Franco did and still does is indicative of loving Black people in ways that challenge Brazilian society's perpetual thirst for Black genocide. What we can glean from her is the importance of direction, going and occupying spaces we were never predicted to be in, and becoming Black in transformative ways that unlock our potentiality. It is one of improvisation, breaks, shifts, and cuts away from where we are supposed to be. It seeks

out predetermined locations that are antithetical to and expunge Blackness, in all its heterogeneity that deviates from the dominant culture, as a means to maintain the status quo of white supremacy, antiblackness, heteronormativity, patriarchal power, and late capitalism. Going to and occupying these spaces in the ways that Franco did, in an unapologetically Black feminist praxis, serves to reimagine what Blackness is and what it is not.

Franco's life is exemplary of Blackness going in directions it was not supposed to go. And yet, her life was taken for that. I neither diminish nor whimsically evade the misogynoir violence exacted against her, on March 14, 2018 and otherwise. U.S. Black feminists have outlined the stakes of solidarity for Franco's life and its role within a global genocidal order practiced against the African diaspora (Caldwell et al., 2018). However, her afterlife continues to haunt and punctuate spaces unable to accommodate her. I wish to explore that more in considering who she is, who she became, and how she continues to live on. Viewing Franco in this context enables us to see the potentiality but also the political stakes of Blackness as directed by a feminist lens. From South America to the Caribbean to North America to Africa to Europe, Black feminist theory and praxis have incessantly gone in spaces they were not suppose to go, advocate and liberate themselves, by extension Black people, and ultimately people.

As a Black woman, lesbian, activist, and mother from the Maré favela, Franco emerges from a social context herself that is most vulnerable and punished. Black women feel the most intense effects and outcomes of the structures of oppression that work through race, gender, and class. This is even more potent considering the role of space, where favelas function as racialized enemy territories that are a threat to Brazilian society (Vargas & Alves, 2010). Black mothers are portrayed as responsible for turning the favela into a criminal factory (Rocha, 2012). Their crime is having children beyond the heteronormative family which many believe that the appropriate punishment for these mothers is incarceration, forced sterilization, and social derision. For someone like Franco, single Black queer mothers from favelas are predetermined to be marked with the brand of general dishonor, deserving of gratuitous violence, and culpable for natal alienation (see O. Patterson, 1982).

To become a councilwomen, activist, and public figure, Franco challenged social understandings and structures of Blackness as they operate through race, class, gender, and space. As she emerged at her public platform, she did so not by avoiding Blackness and her supposed gendered, sexual, classed, and spatial deviance. She embraced her Blackness that marginalized her and made explicit its role in perpetuating forms of social injustice in a democratic society. And she took that as a responsibility to advocate

for injustice writ large. In other words, she was a Black-ass woman in a non-Black space. This is critical considering the role of political representation in Brazil. Political scientists regularly point out the underrepresentation of Black people in governmental politics in Brazil (Dixon, 2016; Hanchard, 1994; O. Johnson III, 1998). Most Blacks who do ascend socially in Brazil tend to minimize racism and participate in patriarchy, gender norms, and relations of capitalistic exploitation in Brazil. They conform to the dominant Eurocentric culture. Franco refused to eschew her origins, communities, and the stigma attached to those markers. This is indicative in her efforts to advocate on behalf of those most marginalized rather than those most privileged. She was less interested in joining the social ranks of the powerful and more invested in infiltrating those spaces and disrupting the concretizations of power embedded there that have traditionally been reserved for white cis-gender men. For her to not only emerge from her social categories but also to be unapologetically a Black feminist disrupted the conventions of the political realm and social world in Brazil.

To move in this direction and be a Black queer woman that contested Brazil's gendered antiblackness was a migration never intended for her. This unfortunately and perhaps predictably cost her life. The history of Black radical feminism is one riddled with violence, injury, and premature death. At the same time, the absence of Black women's bodies does not signify an absence of their presence. To be absolutely clear, this is not a desired effect but rather a disruptive outcome made possible by a collective Black consciousness that desires change and to move towards the path of Black liberation. In the wake of her death (see Sharpe, 2016), Franco's absence continues to proliferate as a symbol of Brazil's gendered antiblackness and the lethal conditions for Brazil's Black population. Her life in death continues to move in ways that counter the imperial imagination that not only socially displaces Black people from particular forms of social, political, ideological, and economic power but, also displaces us from the very bodies that we supposedly possess.

I am cautious and somewhat hesitant about writing about Franco's death, how it reproduces Blackness as injury and the facility by which Black women are burdened to be a corporeal referent for this violence. Still, her political activism is illuminating even in the dark depths of her afterlife. What Franco does remind us is the revolutionary power of Blackness from a Black feminist praxis that moves, occupies, and transforms spaces meant to marginalize, exclude, and kill us. This means disrupting the conventions of Blackness as it operates through race, gender, sexuality, class, and geographies. Part of this is also not only challenging what is conventionally understood to be Black, but also what is understood to be non-Black, those spaces, practices, subjects, and politics that define themselves by their

negation of Blackness. What Franco's life, death, and life in death illuminate is to move beyond Blackness as injury. However, Blackness cannot simply just be about resistance as well. Franco incessantly fought and challenged an extremely inequitable and unjust society. She fought to lay down a new direction, of Blackness anchored by, but ultimately moving past injury and resistance. That direction was to unbound Blackness from injury and resistance and set forth on a path of Blackness that branches out in all its complexity and heterogeneity. This path is a path of love, care, and unpredictability.

Marielle presente!

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WHY BLACK ART IS INHERENTLY POLITICAL

by Neesha Powell-Twagirumukiza

"I'm very Black, Black, Black
Can't send me back, back, back
You take my brother, brother, brother
I fight back, back, back, back."

Listening to these lyrics from Chicago-born soul songstress Jamila Woods, it's clear that she's unafraid of using music as a vehicle for political change.

In Woods' music, I feel the spirit of Nina Simone, who remarked in an interview during the height of her career, "An artist's duty, as far as I'm concerned, is to reflect the times."

Much of Simone's catalog does indeed mirror the times during which she lived—the era of both the Black Civil Rights Movement and the African Independence Movements, when a critical mass of people across the African diaspora wielded art, culture, and politics to challenge global white supremacy and colonialism.

The recording industry hated Simone's explicitly political songs, such as "Mississippi Goddam," which she wrote in response to the widespread anti-Black terrorism of 1963, including the murder of prominent Mississippi Civil Rights activist Medgar Evers.

Simone's career ultimately waned for daring to use her

music as a tool for achieving Black liberation, and many other Black artists have found themselves in this same predicament when choosing to reflect and critique the oppressions faced by their communities.

Upsetting the white gaze comes at a high cost for Black creatives. Even in the age of Black Lives Matter, it's risky for Black artists to call out anti-Black racism, a system of oppression which affords white folks the most financial and social capital in the art and entertainment industries.

There are plenty of contemporary artists unafraid to follow in Simone's footsteps, such as Woods and queer Afrofuturistic musician/actress Janelle Monáe, who feels it's her duty as an artist "to speak out against any discrimination or marginalization of people who might not have the power to gain control of their rights."

Yet still, whether Black artists are obligated to create art that amplifies Black causes continues to be a hotly contested topic.

As a Black writer, I empathize with Black artists who reject the political as part of their praxis. However, I've come to realize that it's futile to isolate our art from our politics. Here are three reasons why I believe Black art is inherently political:

1. White and non-Black People of Color (NBPOC) individuals and corporations are profiting from stealing Black art.

Black art is inherently political because Europeans have capitalized handsomely from it since first making contact with us, while most Black artists haven't. The theft of Black transgender (trans) and queer art stings in particular for me as a Black queer non-binary woman.

When Madonna's *Vogue* became one of her best-selling singles, the Black and Brown trans and queer artists who created the ballroom culture scene where Madonna "discovered" voguing reaped no financial rewards.

Ballroom kids didn't profit from being featured in the legendary 1990 documentary *Paris Is Burning*, either.

Jennie Livingston, the film's white queer woman director, isn't transparent about how much she's earned from the cult classic, but we do know that the documentary's Black and Brown trans and queer participants continued living poor in New York City after the film earned millions in theaters. Tragically, many of them died shortly after the film's release due to the era's AIDS epidemic.

Black art is inherently political because almost 30 years after the debut of *Paris Is Burning*, poor health and living

conditions are still the norm for Black queer, trans, and gender-nonconforming artists.

To add insult to injury, white LGBTQ artists today still feel emboldened enough to steal our work, as seen last year when David France, a white cisgender gay man, stole the ideas and research of Black trans woman filmmaker Reina Gossett to direct a documentary on the life of Black queer and trans liberation heroine, Marsha P. Johnson.

Black artists make art because it's our calling, not simply for coins, but it's unjust when white people capitalize off our creations and stories while we don't. Until we live in a world where white and NBPOC face real consequences for stealing and profiting from us, our art will remain inherently political.

2. White and non-Black People of Color are defining and claiming Black art for themselves.

Black art is inherently political because there are white and NBPOC who feel they deserve access to and ownership of it more than actual Black people.

There are several instances where white people have gained appreciation of Black, Indigenous, and POC art forms and then claimed it as their own over time. Their control of the media allowed them to successfully erase Black people as the true founders of jazz, country, and rock music.

White supremacist pop culture has erased the contributions of Black queer women so thoroughly that I only recently learned about Black bisexual musician Sister Rosetta Tharpe who was nicknamed the "Godmother of Rock and Roll."

White supremacy even shows up in hip-hop, unarguably founded by Black people, by enabling white male rappers to achieve success without paying homage to hip-hop's roots in raw urban Black life.

In a textbook example of why white folks shouldn't define Black art, white male rapper Post Malone said during an interview last year, "If you're looking for lyrics, if you're looking to cry, if you're looking to think about life, don't listen to hip-hop." The Post Malones of the world are why Black people must be protective of our art forms.

We must protect Black art because institutions such as the Brooklyn Museum still aren't convinced that we're able to define our own creations. Earlier this year, the museum appointed a white woman, Kristen Windmuller-Luna, to the position of consulting curator for African art, rightfully sparking outrage on social media.

Windmuller-Luna's credentials are impressive, but it's inequitable when a white person gets to assign value to African artifacts, while Black guests are lucky to even gaze at them without being racially profiled.

We must insist upon defining Black and/or African art for ourselves or white and NBPOC will gladly do it for us.

3. The ancestors of Black folks intended for art to be liberatory.

Black culture looks many different ways, in part because of chattel slavery and colonization, but we all employ art in ceremonial, intentional, and symbolic ways to uplift our race.

Enslaved Africans in the U.S. gave instructions in the fields to follow the Big Dipper towards freedom in the North via the song, "Follow the Drinkin' Gourd."

Post-slavery, the Harlem Renaissance (1920s-30s) and the Black Arts Movement (1960s-70s) were transformative eras in which Black artists cultivated pockets of brilliance and joy where Black narratives were intrinsically valuable and Black liberation was a collective goal.

I often romanticize the Harlem Renaissance, then I remember that many Renaissance artists, such as folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, were financially and socially indebted to wealthy white benefactors who could pull their funding if they pushed the envelope too far.

This reminds me of Black artists today who are forced to choose between their craft and their pro-Black politics. It reminds my of why the once-conscious Kanye West now heaps praise on blatantly racist President Donald Trump. White supremacy and capitalism have the power to depoliticize artists in the name of the almighty dollar.

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Surely West's anti-Black political posturing isn't what Nina Simone had in mind when she said that art should reflect the times. Black art was never intended to roll back our progress, but instead to move us towards a more just world not only for people of African descent, but for all historically oppressed people.

Thankfully, we can look to our own backyards to locate Black artists who understand that Black art can't be separated from the political while our people are being unjustly treated as both less than human and superhuman.

In my backyard of the Pacific Northwest, I'm fortunate to be surrounded by myriad Black queer and trans artists

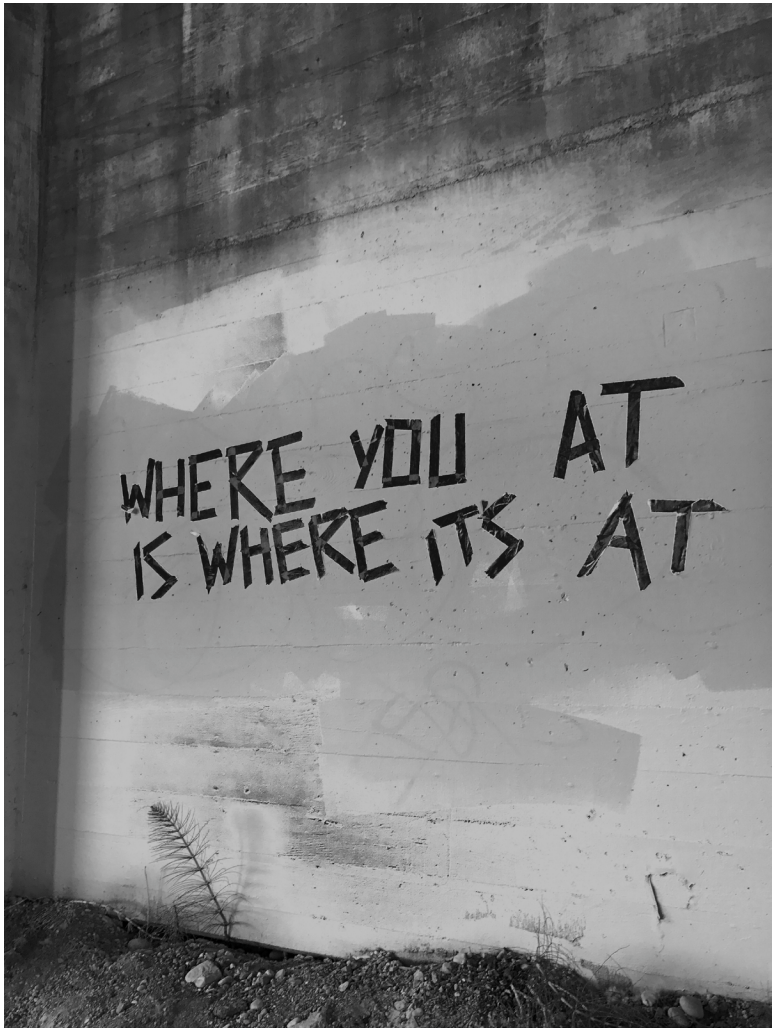
who are mobilizing communities around art to create social change.

One of these artists is CHIMAERA, a producer, curator, filmmaker, cultural storyteller, and creative facilitator hailing from Tacoma, WA, who believes that Black art is inherently political because it's one of the most powerful catalysts of change second to outright violence.

Instead of purchasing West's new album, let's give our resources to local underrated Black artists like CHIMAERA who center liberation in their work. It's time for consumers and patrons who subscribe to social justice to intentionally support Black artists who are invested in Black futures.

POEMS

by Christopher Paul Jordan



where you at (outside) — tape on concrete — Christopher Paul Jordan 2018

educating whites

Black shrapnel
burn your way
into atmosphere

Terminal velocity
never enough body
to land

educating whites (outside) — tape on concrete — Christopher Paul Jordan 2018

a location

Somewhere
deep in the black
others can see
the stars
that we
were made
from

a location (outside) — tape on concrete — Christopher Paul Jordan 2018

Gwen — Acrylic on cardboard, 16 x 9 x 4" — Christopher Paul Jordan 2016

C. Davida Ingram, Britta Johnson, and dk pan discuss *When I Rub the Dead Skin of the Thing against Me I Find I am Soft, Brown and Human*

by C. Davida Ingram, dk pan, and Britta Johnson

B: Hi Davida, thanks so much for sharing this work with us. Was there an initiating event or thought process that led you to making this work?

DI: I think the thought process behind making the work was a couple different things. In my practice I have been making social inquiries with marginalized communities, and often times my work is done with people who on a regular basis do cultural work – people who are teaching artists, people who are educators, people who are community organizers. I care about celebrating the public service that they provide that is the connective tissue that keeps society from falling apart. Most often in my art, my intention is wanting to tell their lives in a medium that doesn't flatten what they do, but actually helps it be seen in a more expansive light.

A separate part of my work is how the social conditions that I live in affect me as a person, an actual person since the chief tenant of white supremacy is that people of color are objects not subjects and incapable of feeling. As a human, I am preoccupied with what it means to both think and feel in a dehumanizing landscape without always giving that same precept the authority it prefers.

The model that's in this particular art piece is an engineer named Jane. When I first met her, one of the things I noticed about her was that she had this really quietly powerful presence. Her beauty also aesthetically involves really pleasing

harmonious features. (I really enjoy looking at birds, like sparrows, their beauty strikes me the same way, it sort of flutters through.)

When I was working on the *Lexical Tutor* series, which *When I Rub the Dead Skin of the Thing against Me I Find I am Soft, Brown and Human* is part of, I did portraits of Jane with a pink parachute. A lot of times in my work, surfaces, fabrics, and coverings are part of the backdrop of the work, and they mean specific things to me; I don't really expect them to mean much to the viewer – the viewer can make up whatever story they want – but I'm picking them for specific reasons.

Separately, along the way while working on *Lexical Tutor* with Jane, I started using – this is going to sound really strange and odd – raccoon penis bones. In Black folk culture, when you're making conjures, raccoon penis bones sometimes show up. (Actually, there's an awful lot of dead animal artifacts online; the animal trafficking market online is a little bit disturbing for me.)

Anyways, I got the raccoon penis bones, and as I was looking at them, I was like, 'I wonder if there are raccoon pelts, too,' so that is how Jane and the pelts came together. I care about depicting Black beauty because it sits astride, and is often conflated with, a lot of the social ugliness that white supremacy produces. For example, in white supremacy,

Lexical Tutor: Jane with Raccoon Pelts — C. Davida Ingram 2018

some of the racial epithets that have been lobbed at Black people include calling us coons.

Part of exploring Blackness for me is looking at all these different artifacts, not just how white people imagine us, which I think is the most unimportant thing – it's there, and you have to contend with it in a white supremacist society, but for me it's largely not meaningful – but how Black people have made sense of those sorts of things for ourselves does matter to me, and how I see them for myself.

In terms of working with animal parts in my work, I have my own feelings of complicity around how these things are being gathered. I realize my complicity in it. I felt like once I ended up with two pelts that I wanted to do something that honored them. I didn't know how they died, I didn't know how they got skinned, and I didn't want to be doing what we often do in America which is just acquire things, and turn things that used to be living into objects that we don't have any feelings about. The piece with Jane was a kind of pulling together those two thoughts. I think in our version of humanity we're apex predators, so we put our experience on top. As I'm anthropomorphizing the raccoons and their presence, what I'm really trying to do, too, is the alchemy of equalizing, taking those pelts and thinking about what's the spirit behind them, and then also thinking about the way Black people are objectified in a similar fashion in America, and putting that energy together,

conjuring it into something that's about agency and power, but without having to say a whole lot.

B: One of my favorite things about your work is that I think of you as one of the artists I know who is really trying to invent, not sure if it is utopian, but new spaces, to show new ways to be, and it's a difficult thing to do, because you need to make decisions about what existing stuff to bring along, and what baggage it has, and how to transform it.

DI: Well, I always laugh, when people try to place me as an artist through the notion of discipline. I think Blackness is overdisciplined and I can be annoyingly literal. So, more than anything I'm a writer who is stubborn. Though, I was trained as a visual artist I keep insisting on writing in the gallery, writing in ways that don't require text. I feel like the nexus point for me is being super promiscuous with materials but really monogamous to a personal narrative and storytelling. I don't want to impose on my viewer. Like it's really not essential to me that the viewer be able to follow along whatever diaristic thing I am up to. Most of the work that I'm working on is pretty therapeutic for me. There's something I'm sorting out with my psyche that compels me to complete work, and it may be like an avoidance sort of thing, but I don't think I want people in my head space.

When I was doing *The Deeps*, the first project I did with composer and vocalist Hanna Benn, (she is one of my

favorite collaborators), I worked with a hypnotist to figure out why I had stopped crying, or didn't cry much, and she explained the concept of the unconscious to me. My take away is that your unconscious is part of you that's there completely just to keep you safe. It's not verbal; it doesn't have a sense of time; it's always in the present. She unlocked something for me.

I was like, 'Oh, how do I talk to this part of myself when I may need to shift, or be in a different way, or to let it know that my conscious self is ok with a certain set of things that I have learned. And that I can also move on to the next set of tasks that come with recognizing something that may have felt super harmful to me at a certain point as a young person in the past, or even as an adult, is no longer a problem.'

And I think that when it comes to the psychic wound of race a lot of my artwork is little magic spells. I'm intentional about always working with dark skinned models; clearly we live in a global world and there are all kinds of races and appearances of human subjectivity, but when we think about dehumanization, there's a certain way that black-skinned women in particular are dehumanized, and I think that's tied to understanding how a world that plays out in a linear fashion doesn't like indigenous things or people.

Lexical Tutor: Jane with Parachute — C. Davida Ingram 2018

In every single society that you can imagine, Australia, Japan, South Africa, North America, there's always been a darker indigenous population that's been annihilated to make place for newer people coming in, and I think there's a part of me that's really aligned with having us as humans sit and think through the way that time plays out and knowing how the story ends and then, too, to begin (re) imagining, if there is some other way that we could exist with one another that is not so violent, is not so structured around erasures, not so deadly?

I was just reading an article by someone who was talking about the wisdom of forests, (I may be conflating two articles I read) but they had made a correlation with the loss of forests and the loss of indigenous tongues, because people who've been living in nature for a long time have words and ways of describing it that people who don't live in nature don't. When we erase those things, it makes sense to me that ecosystems are dying because we don't have the knowledge systems in modernity to take care of the planet as we attempt to dominate nature. We can't exist without the planet; we think we can, and our ego-based mind might tell us we can, but the things that have to exist depend on an ecosystem and an environment, not our human ego. My work isn't eco-art at all, but it's very tied to those older sign systems; because my blood and aesthetic ancestry is there.

I'm really interested in that type of semiotic that is not always prioritizing the human mind because it may be brilliant but it is not yet wise.

DK: So with the title of this specific piece, and then I feel like in general, a lot of your work has a sensuality, kind of a sensuous / emotive quality to it, and it's interesting, knowing you personally I know you're very… literate isn't the proper term, but there's a very writerly, an academic part to you. Can you speak about where you feel like that sensuality becomes kind of a communicative tool, and maybe also how your work becomes an invitation? 'Cause I feel like its core is generous.

DI: Yeah, I think I am a really heady person, in a lot of different respects; I think that sometimes if you're in your head a lot you're avoiding things. I used to work with this energy healer named Colby, and he would be like, 'you have to sink down into heart space' and I would be like 'you are so corny,' but then that advice has been so helpful to me.

A lot of my work is about vulnerability, and I think that's because my work is following Black feminist traditions, and if you look at some of the precepts that we have, around what being feminine is: it's receptive, it's emotional, it's emotive, it's nurturing, it's open, it's able to work with a lot of things that aren't related to thoughts, so it may not be logical.

I don't think this society is set up in any way where I could function in that space the majority of my time, and I think we're all a balance of masculine and feminine energies, but I think the things that we project on the feminine in capitalism and white supremacy and in patriarchy (I don't know if it's always helpful to conjoin those things like they work as one whole, I think they just happen to be layers of power), I think that's external power, and I'm really interested in interior power.

The artist and designer Susie Lee got me thinking about soft power, and again, because I'm not like that, meaning soft, in my day-to-day life, it's a protected sanctuary space for me in my artwork where I get to imagine, 'what if the world were like this: what if the world was softer, what if the world was more magnificent, what if the world was more open-ended, what if the world wasn't so deeply inscribed by societal notions, who would I be, how would I get lost, how would I find myself again?' I don't know if my work is always successful, but I think I'm always trying to do those things with it. I want to light a path for indigenous and Black Diasporic thought to help illuminate human experiences, to be its root system.

DK: When you were talking earlier about working with Jane as [the] model you repeatedly [depict], and thinking about projections, and I guess tying into my personal thing, do you consider it self-portraiture in some context?

DI: Jane is the model who appears in the series *Lexical Tutor.* Is that series about self-portraiture? Maybe not in a literal sense. I mean, I think it's highly personal, and I think portraiture is always telling you how someone is looking, and so maybe it's a self-portrait because I could get a lot of people to take a picture of Jane, but it won't look like the picture of Jane that I'm going to give. There are certain ideas that I aim to bring to that looking process that might make the picture look the way it does.

There is a different series of mine that came before *Lexical Tutor, Where Can my Black Ass Go to be Safe*. In it, I was testing a hypothesis of 'can anyone beyond Black women imagine safety for Black women,' (which seems to really not be the case in the series and its findings). But its formula for gathering info was asking people to take a picture of my ass and then answering the question where could a Black woman go to be safe. The thing that I found endless perverse pleasure in that particular piece was just how strange my ass became based on who took the picture. Sometimes it was like an erotic object. Sometimes it was this alien, oblong thing, and then sometimes it looked just like a haunch, and so I was like 'oh, it's moving between meat and flesh.' Like one you consume, the other you enjoy. Hopefully you're not doing both. The list poem that resulted showed me only Black women were able to imagine safety for Black women and I think that is telling. Not Black men. Not men of color. Not white gay men. Not white women. Black

women could imagine safety and there is an intelligence there that gives me life.

Jane's portrait is never that fraught. I wanted to get to a certain kind of stillness with her, which I really enjoyed. It's nerve-racking to be a model. I'm really fussy about my own picture; I love selfies, because I know what angles work for me, but it's really hard to leave your face in the care of someone who's not looking, or who's looking at something beyond you.

B: Self-representation, control of body, is a big issue in general, and seems very present in your work; does controlling the figure feel like a way of gaining your own self, too?

DI: I think a lot of my projects come to me as these really impressionistic images, and I have to kind of be faithful that they can be realized. The piece *Procession* that I did with the women in the beekeeper veils is from a really really old memory of mine, when I was maybe 14. Years later, when I walked into the space at King Street at 39, I knew that I could go back to that memory artistically to help it come to life. But then there were also nice happenstance, synergistic things, like I happened to look at a picture of a woman wearing a beekeeper's veil, and was like 'oh, that looks strangely futuristic.' Honey is such a familiar notion, but the thought of how humans get domesticated honey, and going down that whole hive of bee culture was really amazing, especially because so many bees are dying right now because of modern life, and industrialized agriculture, and Monsanto's use of neonicotinoids.

B: The beekeeper's veil is such a nice part of that piece; it looks like a ceremonial object, and a veil, and a safety, and just grand – all these different things.

DI: With *Procession*, I think the thing that makes that piece work depends on how the human eye likes repetition. In the video there is the circle of the beekeeping hat, the circular motion of the drone shooting the video, and the circles of the clocks in the clock tower. It's almost like sacred geometry. It would never occur to me, logically, to shoot that, but intuitively it made sense as I worked with the crew and especially in the editing.

B: One of the goals of the *High Wall* is to honor the history of the Inscape building's past function as Seattle's immigration processing and detention center by showing the work of artists who come from immigrant families, or whose work deals with issues of migration and diaspora. Can you talk about how you approach these issues in your work?

DI: If you think about the notion of how America became, I normally spell these things out, in order to shift that binary of belonging and otherness, and the notion of who does America really belong to, and if you don't belong

there, does that make you an Other. Native Americans have been here since time immemorial. America belongs to them. Period. In America, there are also subsequent migrations and arrivals. Thinking about the history of detention in the old INS building, I think it really behooves African Americans, immigrants of color, and white people to talk about, well, how did we end up in this place? Did we get here a long time ago, did we get here recently? What were the things that made us come or what forced us to be here?

I remember a long time ago I was at a lecture by the scholar Hazel Carby. She was talking about the transatlantic slave trades being the largest act of globalization. It was done on the heels of the colonizing migration of European settlers who were coming to the new world, looking in an extractive way for resources. They were so annihilative with Native populations and they couldn't subjugate them and turn them into slaves, which is why they went looking in Africa. I think the layers of present-day America are: Native genocide, the Black transatlantic slave trades, U.S. and European imperialism, and white identity formation, along with subsequent immigrations of whites and people of color. On this path, there are people who used to not be white. They used to be whatever ethnicity or nationality they were in Europe. I think the violence of Europe was something that white people wanted to get out of, and I think in the Americas, whiteness got to have a life that it couldn't have in Europe.

There is a wedge that's often placed between African American identities and immigrant identities that does not have to be there, a false dichotomy. My family comes from Mississippi, the Carolinas, and Arkansas on our American journey. My mom's dad came from a family of landowners who farmed cotton. When I think about Black sharecroppers and Black landowners in the South it connects to migrant work; people who live from the land and hold connections there. They had to live off of the land and their labor was exploited because they lived off the land. That seems very akin to what happens with Latino fruit pickers. White European immigrants, because of whiteness, get to pretend that they are just naturally American — but many have that more modest beginning with the land, too.

I was thinking about the white dudes in the khakis and tiki torches who recently marched in the white supremacy rally in Charlottesville. I would love to look at their DNA results. How many generations have they been here to be yelling blood and soil? Native folks can claim that, yes. White boys, nah. I've met so many white people who really bought into the concept of the preeminence of whiteness. It's not like they've been here super long. It's just that the concept of white superiority is 500 years long in the States, and in white supremacy that magically somehow means forever for someone who does not understand time.

B: Did you see the documentary *Rumble* that just came out, about Native Americans in the music industry?

DI: Oh yeah, I did see that, that was pretty amazing.

B: Yeah, so good! Something you said made me think of it – the idea of groups finding each other, and combining, but also how groups distance themselves from each other.

DI: Yeah but what I heard really loud and clear with *Rumble*, and I think this is something to be mindful of, I think there's a rightful concern, and in some cases even resentment, from Native Americans about how Black pain is often heard over and above Native pain. And so I think in my own cultural practice, it's really important for me to have meaningful ties with Native Americans. This is their land and I have built a life here. I really appreciate living in Seattle because it's one of the few cities where there's more visibility and cultural power for Native folks.

I think in America there's a lot of fancifulness, in terms of people who haven't grown up in Native culture asserting that they're part Native genetically. It's one thing to have the phenotype or the DNA and I think it's another thing to be committed to the culture. Like it's really clear to me, whatever blood I might have inside of me, I'm culturally African American. If you spend holidays with me I'm gonna make certain foods, the foods I grew up with: greens, dressing, sweet potato pie. I stay in my lane for these reasons because I know where I was acculturated. As African Americans, we're not settler colonialists; we have that one exemption that most other groups don't have because we had an enforced migration. We won't ever have an easy way of going back home. Maybe this is also why I would love to see Black folks and Native folks organizing together much more and seeing that connected to immigrant advocacy because whiteness attacks us all at once. I think it's a really important part of healing this country — making it a real home — to be intentional about how we come together and hold space for one another. I don't think anything's going to go right in the U.S. until Native folks and Black folks have some space to heal, and not space that's made to talk about whiteness, but rather to find out exactly how do we want to exist in this country once we abolish white supremacy.

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C. Davida Ingram, *David Rue and Randy with Black Lives Matter Sign*, 2018

Back Cover
C. Davida Ingram, *Aimée with Augur Buzzard*, 2018

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