

***Freedom Bound: Notes on Conscious Creativity and the Journey for Justice***  
***Or***  
***Living a Radical Love Praxis***  
***Or***  
***Living a Radical Creative Praxis***

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Good morning. Turn to the person on your left and right as introduce yourself. Ask them why they decided to be here today. Why are you here?

*For Lottie Bell Sims*  
*For Pearl Glover*  
*For Bertha Lee Sims*  
*For Betty Ann Sims*  
*For Nelma Hicks*  
*For Heather Autumn Hicks*  
*For Jayla, Joi, and Jaynah Dancy*  
*For Audrina Hicks*  
*For Brooklyn Hicks*  
*For Helana Hicks*  
*For the babies yet to be born*  
*For the ancestors whose names I will never know*  
*For my mentors and teachers who are not in this room*  
*For my friends and family here in this room*  
*Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Shannon Turner, Keryl McCord,*  
*For me*

I am here today because my life-long love affair with the arts has been the most profound, transformative, healing, enlightening, awe-inspiring aspect of my life. I am here because I have witnessed the power of creativity and its capacity to truly loosen the spiritual, political, and educational shackles tethering individuals and communities to experiences of

I am here because creativity is a universal medicine I call on in moments of ecstatic celebration, challenging growth spurts, and during times of profound loss.

I'm here because creativity is a liberation technology that guides all aspects of my personal and public life. It is the way in which I experience my deepest connections to the divine, to community, and is the most significant method by which I support social justice movements in my communities of accountability.

A song that has increasingly become a necessary component of my prayer and meditation practice.

*We have come this far*  
*And we won't turn around*  
*We'll flood the streets with justice*  
*We are freedom bound*

This song enlivens me. It reminds me that the pursuit of freedom and justice is a journey. It reminds me of the power and capacity of collective action to transform, heal, and make our communities whole. Each line begins with WE. In this short, powerful song, WE say we four times. That's significant. The repetition of WE won't let me forget the strength of an intentional, rigorous, love-filled, vibrant community. WE wraps itself lovingly around each poetic line of this freedom song. WE is the most present word in this song for me. Each line: WE come, WE won't, WE justice, WE freedom. WE not I. What a radical and visionary precept. The WE is stronger than the I. WE is the foundation, the fertile root, the reason, the strategy and the tool. WE is the magic. There it is. Power. Collective. WE are not alone.

I am here because of many WEs before me. Because my family dreamed WE into existence. Because they dreamed bigger than themselves. They dreamed a WE a collective WE. Because of their bold, black, love, many WEs came through. WE are here.

What do you do with that kind of love? A love that expands exponentially every time your lungs inflate. A love that ripples out into the world with each poem, each dance, each home cooked meal. A love that expands exponentially with every beat of your heart. An unending love. With every beat of your grandmother's heart? What do you do with the love that birthed you?

March 17 my grandmother Bertha Sims will be 85 years young. I spent my last birthday with her. We made Big Red floats, a Texas delicacy, and watched countless hours of basketball. My granny is a sports fanatic. One evening we played cards and listened to Shirley Caesar, her favorite gospel singer. My grandmother rocked and sang. We talked, but mostly I studied her. I studied the gentle creases around her mouth, the way her hair curls around her ears, her chiseled cheek bones, the curve of her fingers, the way her eyes fill with excitement when she's about to win, the clack, rasp and timber of her laugh, and her ability to correct my mistakes as we played cards. Several times she would pause mid-verse and shake her finger at me because of some inadvertent mistake. She is one tough lady.

I search for myself in her. Find the melodies we share, where our palms connect. I look into her eyes and search for my own. I find my dance in her sway. My I am definitely Bertha's granddaughter.

*WE both travel the wind  
and hold our dreams like precious coin*

*WE both fire-tongued  
And sweet-lipped*

*WE both carry oceans in our eyes  
The roar and roll of oceans*

Occasionally, she will ask. Ebony, you still live in New York? Yes ma'am, I respond. You ok, up there? Yes ma'am. She looks at me. Focused. Making sure I'm not lying. Yes ma'am. I get to make art, and teach, and learn in one of the most exciting places I've ever lived. I always thank her for making it possible for me to live so far away from home. I want her to know that I honor her work and sacrifice, her investment. She smiles and we sing and play cards.

*My grandmother birthed five daughters  
Billie, Betty, Shellie, Dorothy, and Linda.  
I am her first granddaughter  
I am the aunt to six girls  
Jaylah, Joi, Jaynah, Audrina, Brooklyn, Helana  
Who nah who nah nah nah  
Who think they bad*

*WE all poems in flight*

What do you do with the love that birthed you? My friends at C4 Atlanta invited me to talk about collective transformation, inclusion, and community building through arts and culture. I'm letting myself off the hook here. I have no catch-phrases or magic tricks to share with you. There isn't a blueprint or a guide book.

Indeed we are in a moment where the most pressing issues impacting communities require an all hands on deck approach to solve them. No one can ride the bench when we our schools are corporatized occupied zones, when our children are not safe in public spaces, when our elders are not safe in their homes, when my womb is a contested battle zone a political playground for those vying for power, when we treat the earth like a trash dump. In a time of wide-spread displacement of individuals, cultures, and communities in the re-emergence of gentrification. In a time when legislative policies seem to amplify and increase humans separation of the earth, the universe, and each other. We are living in times of abundant beauty, hope, and possibility. We are also living in times that require a rigorous creative practice rooted in love, transformation, and future-forward change-making.

While I don't have answers, I do have a practice and experiences that root my work. For those of us who are invested a life built on conscious creativity consider:

1. Developing and committing to a personal creative practice.

For me, creativity is practice. Wholistic practice. Social justice practice. Love practice. A practice that honors the capacity of my family and my community as creative conjurers, as way-makers, as trailblazers. Practice that honors you and your people as creators. Looking through my early creative experiences, I recognize that creativity is a practice of spiritual seeing, a ritual to honor multiple generations living inside me--speaking through me, it is a way of tasting the world, and cultivating discernment about what I want, what I need, what feels good, what is most important.

2. Creativity is a tool for personal de-colonization and transformation.

The work of weaving creativity into all that I do publicly must impact my personal evolution. Again creativity is a life-practice. It isn't a 9-5 job or even a career. It isn't a trick or trinket that I can spin out on a whim. Because creativity is an on-going transformative practice in my I am learning and re-learning everyday how to authentically incorporate it into my public work. The private, the public, and the political all rooted in heart-filled work of internal de-colonization through creativity.

3. Creativity takes time and space.

It takes more time than you can account for in grant reports. It takes more time than you can account for on a timesheet. It takes more time than you can account for in building

a campaign. Creativity takes space. It is the life-force that governs space and time. Creativity is boundless but when honored and cultivated can be a willing, conscious, co-conspirator for justice.

4. Collective creativity is a formidable force!

Example 1: SpiritHouse

Example 2: The Gloster Project

Example 3. Grow Green

Example 4: Exhibit BE

Example 5: The Black Project

Example 6: Museum of Impact

Prompt: What does it mean to live a life rooted in conscious creativity? Turn to your neighbor and talk about it.