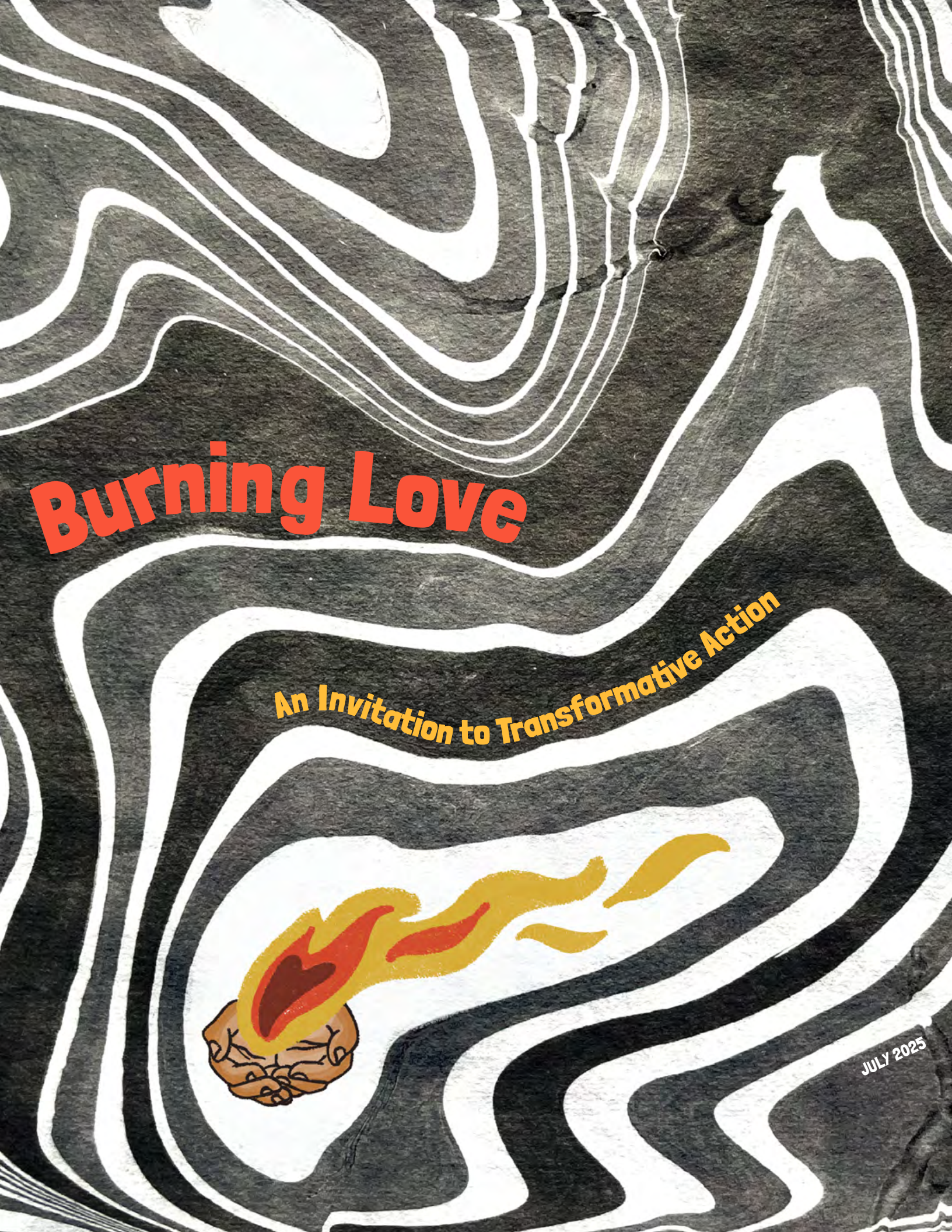


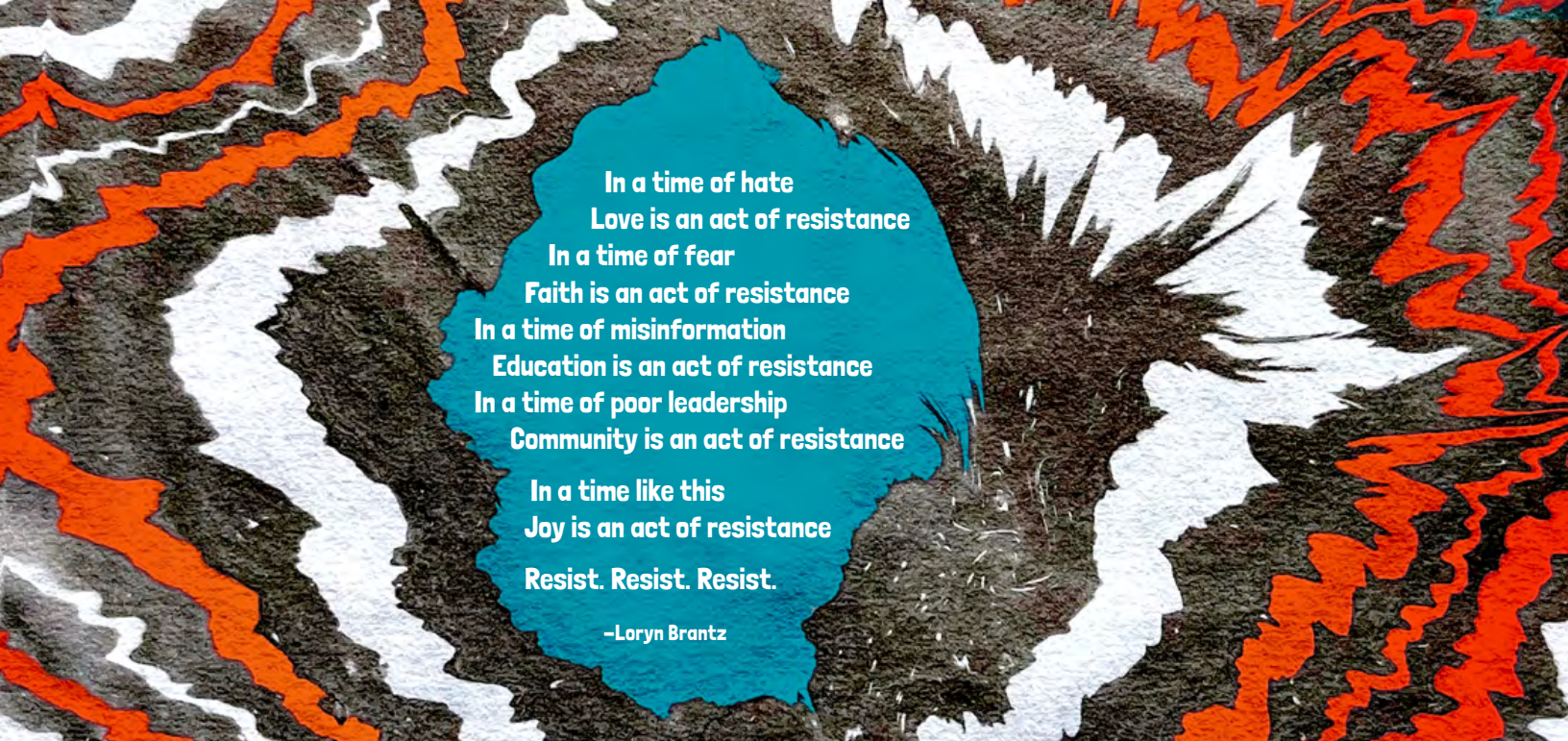


Burning Love

An Invitation to Transformative Action



JULY 2025



In a time of hate
Love is an act of resistance
In a time of fear
Faith is an act of resistance
In a time of misinformation
Education is an act of resistance
In a time of poor leadership
Community is an act of resistance

In a time like this
Joy is an act of resistance
Resist. Resist. Resist.

—Loryn Brantz

Note from the Illustrator

How do we tell the story of cultural inflammation without fanning the flames?

My work as a scribe is very much like that of a naturopath—I draw maps of what is making us sick, and what medicines we have to treat ourselves. I help systems see themselves in their wholeness—a complex dance of growth and decay, beauty and grief, life and death.

So I knew a paper about the burning house needed to be situated in a context beyond the flames—we need to tell the truth about the reality of the plantation still driving our economy, culture, and governance. But we reject the burning house’s story that we survive only because of it. The house is the illness – we are the living body. To tell this story from the wider truth, I returned to water.

Suminigashi is a 2000 year old Japanese printmaking technique of floating ink on water. It is a collaboration between human artist and the spirit of the water which moves the ink as the water likes. The waters co-authoring the illustrations in this paper are from Constitution Lake and Arabia Mountain in Atlanta, GA (Maskoke Territory) and from the ojo de agua—a blue hole in the middle of a desert—in Los Peroles, San Luís Potosí, Mexico. The prints made at Arabia Mountain were taken the day after Hurricane Helene tore through the Southeast—in these prints, instead of making flowing lines, the waters cracked the surface and told the story of rupture.

The images in the Brown Papers on love have always pointed us towards the question of what it means to decolonize ourselves, to see ourselves inseparable from the living earth. These pages are the fruit of direct collaboration with earth and water, not as art materials, but as relatives. These images are sites of our imaginative worldbuilding that live alongside the dreams of water itself. May we remember to collaborate with our lifegiving waters as we face the flames together.

—Cielo



Introduction

Burning Love: An Invitation to Transformative Action

Right now we are being called to imagine. Imagining a world where love is abundant, where power is shared not hoarded. Children running in the meadow, singing, laughing. We are free, we are joyful, we are deeply connected. We are building longer tables, sharing more from our gardens. Burning Love invites us to reimagine what's possible when we center radical love, humanity, creativity, and collective courage.

We are at a pivotal juncture in U.S. history, witnessing the erosion of democratic principles and the consolidation of authoritarian power. The political landscape, long dominated by two major parties, is undergoing a fundamental shift in which one party is engaged in a reckless, abusive, and furious quest to snatch the country back to times of legalized oppression of many for the comfort and self-aggrandizement of a few. And the other party is out-of-touch with the masses and seemingly paralyzed. The physical, emotional, and spiritual toll this is taking on the majority of us is exhausting and overwhelming—it feels at times like the proverbial house we're living in is on fire and we can't get out! These times demand new strategies, fresh perspectives, and collective action. If you are reading this, you are already engaged in the work, whether through personal practice, community organizing, or institutional transformation. This paper invites you to deepen that work with courage, imagination, and unwavering commitment to collective liberation. This paper is for anyone who has ever felt the fire and dared to dream beyond the flames.

A Legacy of Love: The Brown Paper Series

The brown paper series has evolved as a blueprint for radical love and power (love+power), charting pathways toward justice and collective healing and action.

1. **Measuring Love: On the Journey for Justice** (2019) urged intermediaries in social and racial justice spaces to become active participants rather than detached observers—amphibians who navigate land (the real world and its systemic illusions) and water (under which lie the treasures of our hidden assets)—in shaping narratives from within.
2. **Healing Love: Into Balance** (2022) called upon us to embrace compassion and forgiveness as powerful tools, turning hurt, pain, grief, and trauma into nutrients for needed growth and transformation.
3. **Burning Love: An Invitation to Transformative Action** (this paper) presents the challenge before us: to radically redefine our worldview and dismantle oppressive systems—not by reforming or replicating them, but by forging something new together. Our very survival could depend on it, on us.

The throughline for all three papers speaks to a profound choice: **to be complicit in our own oppression or to disrupt it.** And in discovering ways to disrupt it, we develop a strong, conscious, strategic practice with enlightened others toward our collective liberation.

Core Principles: Love+Power in Action



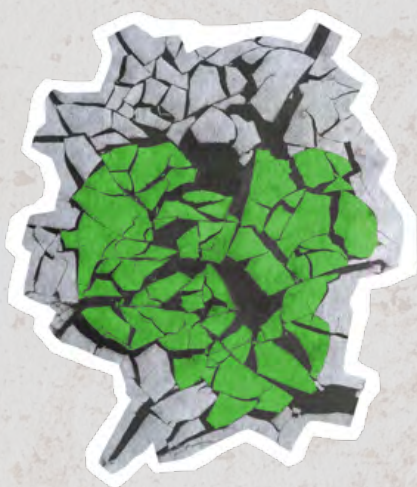
• We Are Sovereign Beings •

We exist within structures of white supremacy and capitalism, but we are not defined by them. We have the agency to resist complicity and reclaim our narratives.



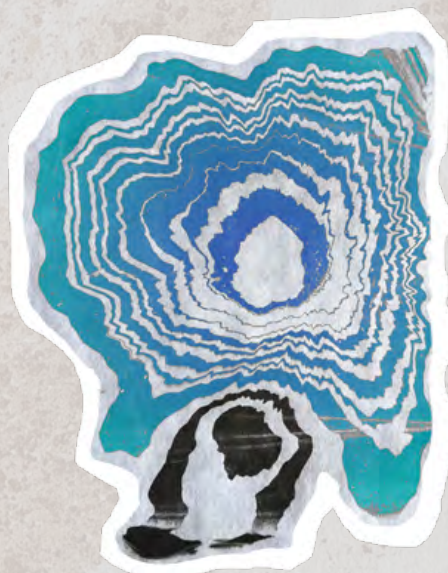
• Liberation is the Embodiment of Love+Power •

True power does not demand domination—it thrives in consent, clear boundaries, and collective uplift.



• Conflict as a Love Language •

We must retrain ourselves to embrace difficult conversations, rejecting systems that encourage division and cancellation among people with different experiences, contributions, and points of view.

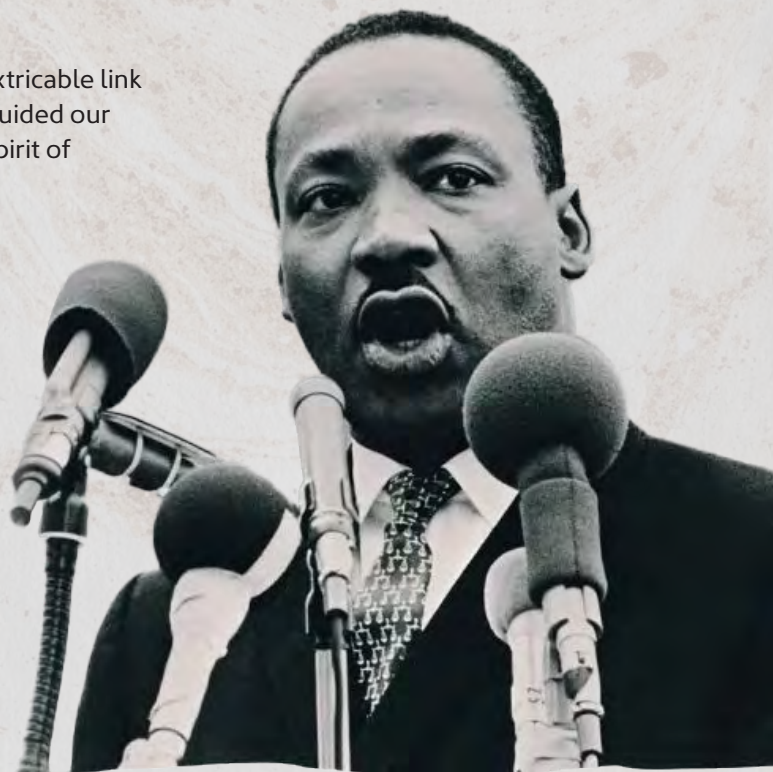


• Resisting Anti-Blackness and Misogynoir •

Our voices and energy must be directed toward confronting oppression, even and especially within movement spaces. Anti-Blackness is a tool of the hierarchy's violence and erasure, misogynoir doubly so, and both have seeped into our most sacred circles.

From the beginning, MLK's clarifying quote about the inextricable link between love and power as the antidote to injustice has guided our thinking. And another quote from Dr. King provoked the spirit of this paper, when at the apex of the Civil Rights struggle, in his deep disappointment and frustration, he declared:

"I fear I am integrating my people into a burning house."



Public domain photo

Audre Lorde's declaration, **"The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,"** serves as an additional, searing, and foundational truth for this work at this time.

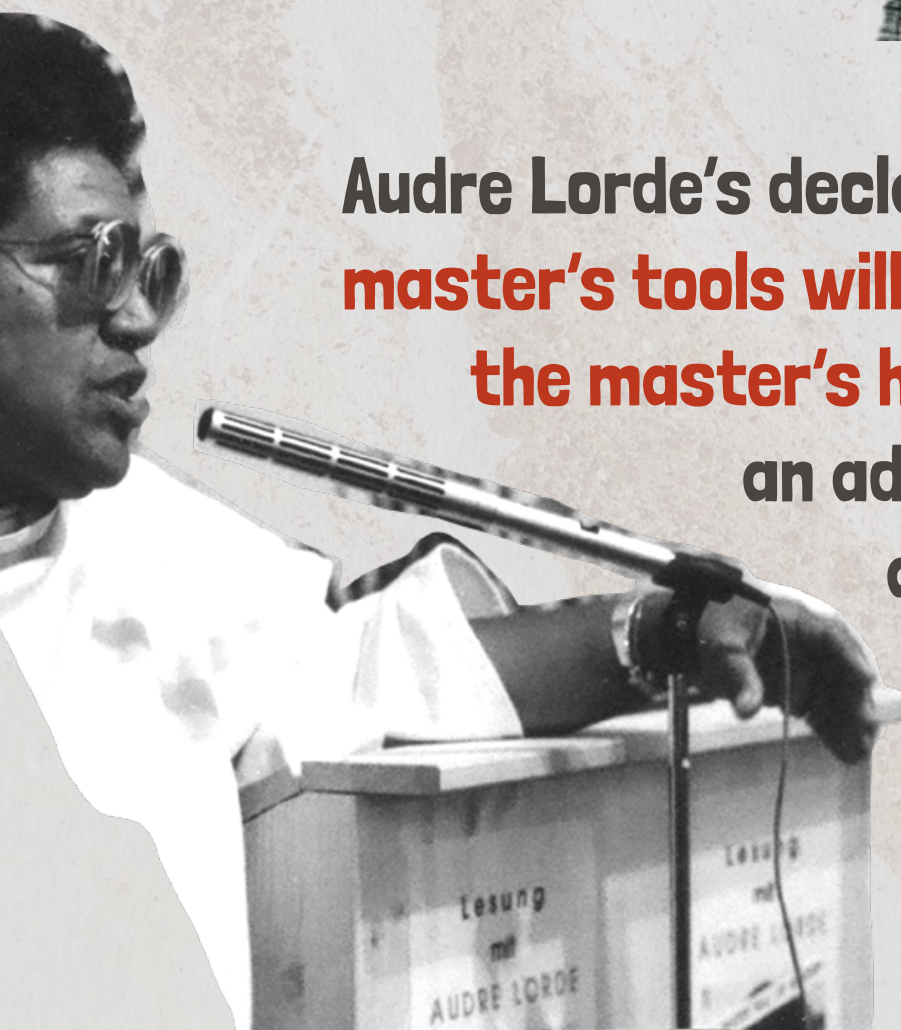


Photo: Elija Sydney Tourkazi

A Framework for ACTION

We are witnessing those in power grasping to pull us back to a time when some in the U.S. were entitled to freedom and privileges (to have nice things, as Heather McGhee¹ put it), while others were barred from these opportunities—or punished for having somehow acquired them. At the same time, there is a seeming rejection of the sense of community that existed years ago, where people felt the obligation to give back as much if not more than they received from their society, or where we all seemed to want to be a contributing part of something and had the sense (even in segregated neighborhoods) that folk looked out for each other. In the U.S. of 2025, we are disconnected from each other (with technology driving us apart instead of bringing us closer), disunited and in dehumanizing conflict with each other (with hate speech, incidents, and hate crimes on the rise). We are hostage to a federal government that unabashedly preferences and excuses their own associates at the expense and devastation of others they see and prosecute as enemies of the state. The course we are on is unsustainable, and it is taking a tremendous toll on those of us who have already lost so much. We must act. We are the ones we have been waiting for.

Our choices in this moment will define the future. We must:

- Put down or radically re-purpose the master's tools.
- Craft new tools rooted in love+power.
- Redefine success by living according to radical values.
- Expand movement spaces to amplify voices historically marginalized.

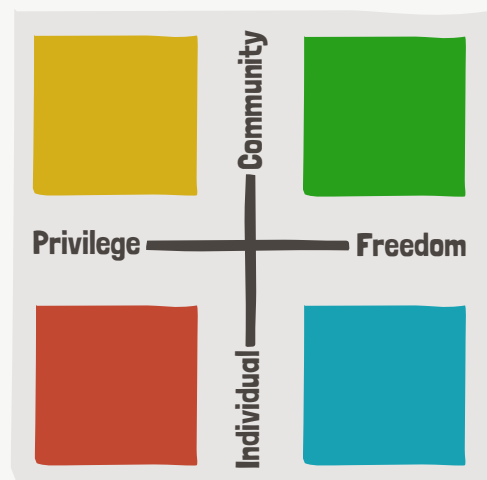


1. McGhee, H. (2021). *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*. One World Press.

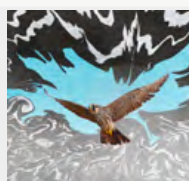
We propose examining two axes as we build a beloved community:

- **Privilege vs. Freedom**—Understanding the dynamics that shape our positionality in navigating structural oppression.
- **Individual vs. Community**—Balancing personal agency with collective responsibility in our striving for well-being and liberation.

With these considerations in mind, we address harm outside of—and importantly, within—movement spaces. We recognize the foundational need to confront sexual violence, anti-Blackness, and misogynoir while acknowledging that all who are not members of the ruling regime are targets of exploitation, diminishment, oppression, and violence.

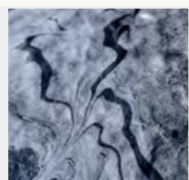


This brown paper is divided into five parts:



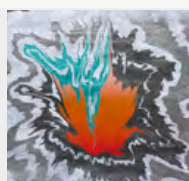
● Transforming Self to Transform the World

Change begins with ourselves.



● Reclaiming Power: A New Way Forward

We have power, individually and collectively, that we must gather and deploy. In doing so, we will chart a new path, changing ourselves and our circumstances.



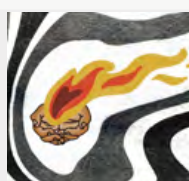
● Pairing Love and Accountability Through Conflict

Conflict is inevitable and nothing to fear. Generative conflict, through mutual love and accountability, provides the friction we need to move forward.



● Confronting Harm in Movement Spaces: A Call for Integrity and Accountability

We must grapple with the harm we do to ourselves and one another, holding movement leadership to a higher standard.



● Keeping Hope Alive: The Power of Faith, Love in Worldbuilding

We end on a heartening note, continuing the work of our ancestors to maintain faith, hope, and love in the struggle for collective liberation.

A few important caveats, dear reader, as you delve into this paper:

- Tools offered here aren't prescriptions, they are **recipes** meant to be tested and adapted to your context. Tools start each chapter as key points and key questions; some are highlighted within the chapters; and there are several supplemental tools at the end of the paper. (Not the master's tools—**our** tools.)
- "White people" in this paper are those who enact a white supremacist belief system, identifying with whiteness as a dominating power structure that puts white comfort above the survival of people of color, gender expansive and working people. We are proposing this term as political affiliation rather than skin color, as there are Brown-skinned people who collaborate with white supremacist systems and there are white people who are co-conspirators of liberation for Black and Brown folk.

We do not yet know what lies ahead, but we do know we cannot remain in a burning house. We must have the courage to gather our resources—love, power, hope, faith, dignity—join together and shape the shelter and the pathway that will guide us into the future.

The Path Forward: Building a New World

Although we may be navigating an era of upheaval as we struggle to free ourselves from this burning house, we must hold onto faith, hope, and love as our guiding principles—just as our ancestors did. We carry the torch of their hope that we will build a new more nurturing world, even though we may not live to enjoy it. The faith that the new world is already in formation, rooted in interconnectedness and interdependence, as liberatory practitioners are every day creating healing rituals, building networks, and fostering communities committed to transformation. **And, above all, love.**

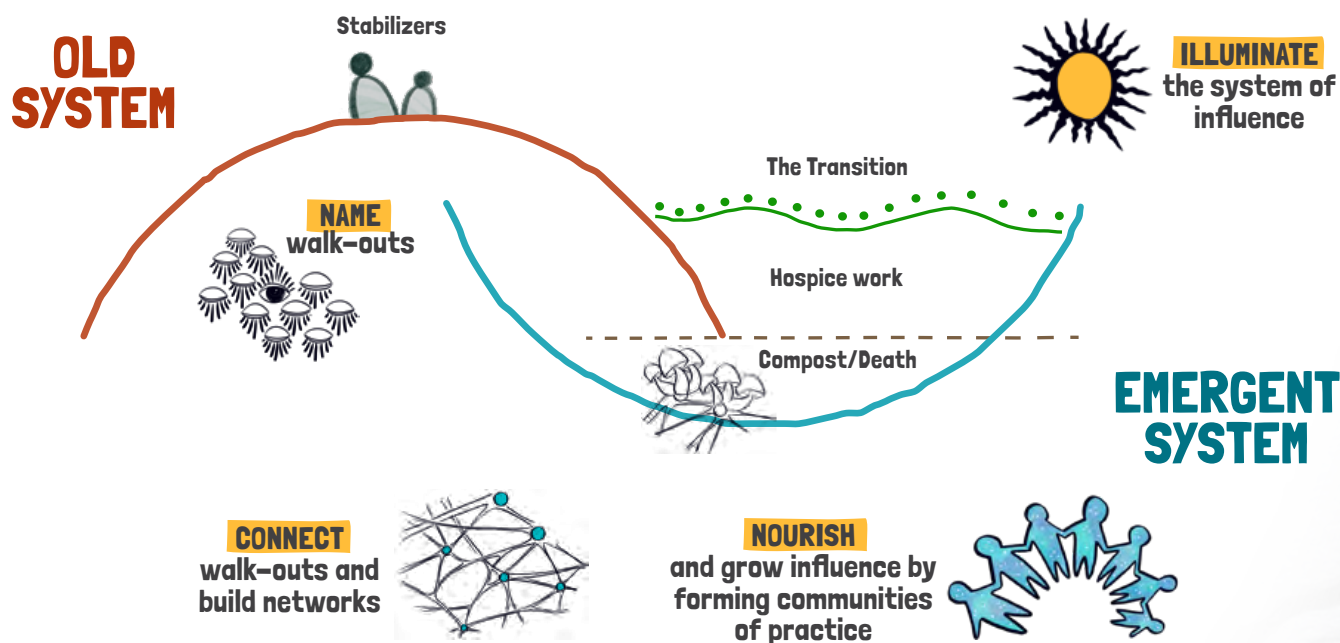


Part 1

The background of the entire image is a complex, high-contrast marbled pattern in shades of black, white, and grey. In the center, there is a bright, solid blue patch that resembles a clear sky. A falcon is shown in flight, positioned within this blue area. The falcon has brown and white speckled plumage on its wings and back, and a lighter-colored head. Its wings are spread wide, and it is facing towards the left. The overall composition suggests a theme of freedom, transformation, or overcoming challenges.

Transforming Self
TO
Transform the
World

• Two Loops Model •



Adapted from the [Berkana Institute](#) and [Lana Jelenjev](#)

Key Points

- We can choose to reclaim our narrative power by defining and redefining what is success for ourselves and our communities.
- We can own our stories that uplift our justice journeys.
- We can name and respect our boundaries as sacred parts of ourselves that enable us to work for justice for the long haul.
- We can embrace our power with love that stands for progress, justice, collective healing, and freedom for all, not for just some.

Key Questions

- Who benefits when we fail to love ourselves?
- What if all that is happening now is the push we need to get to where we envision ourselves going?

There is a profound truth that systemic change begins with, and is powered by, personal transformation. To build a liberated future, we must first redefine our own relationships with power, love, and success—divesting from dominant worldviews that seek to control and suppress us. The work begins within.

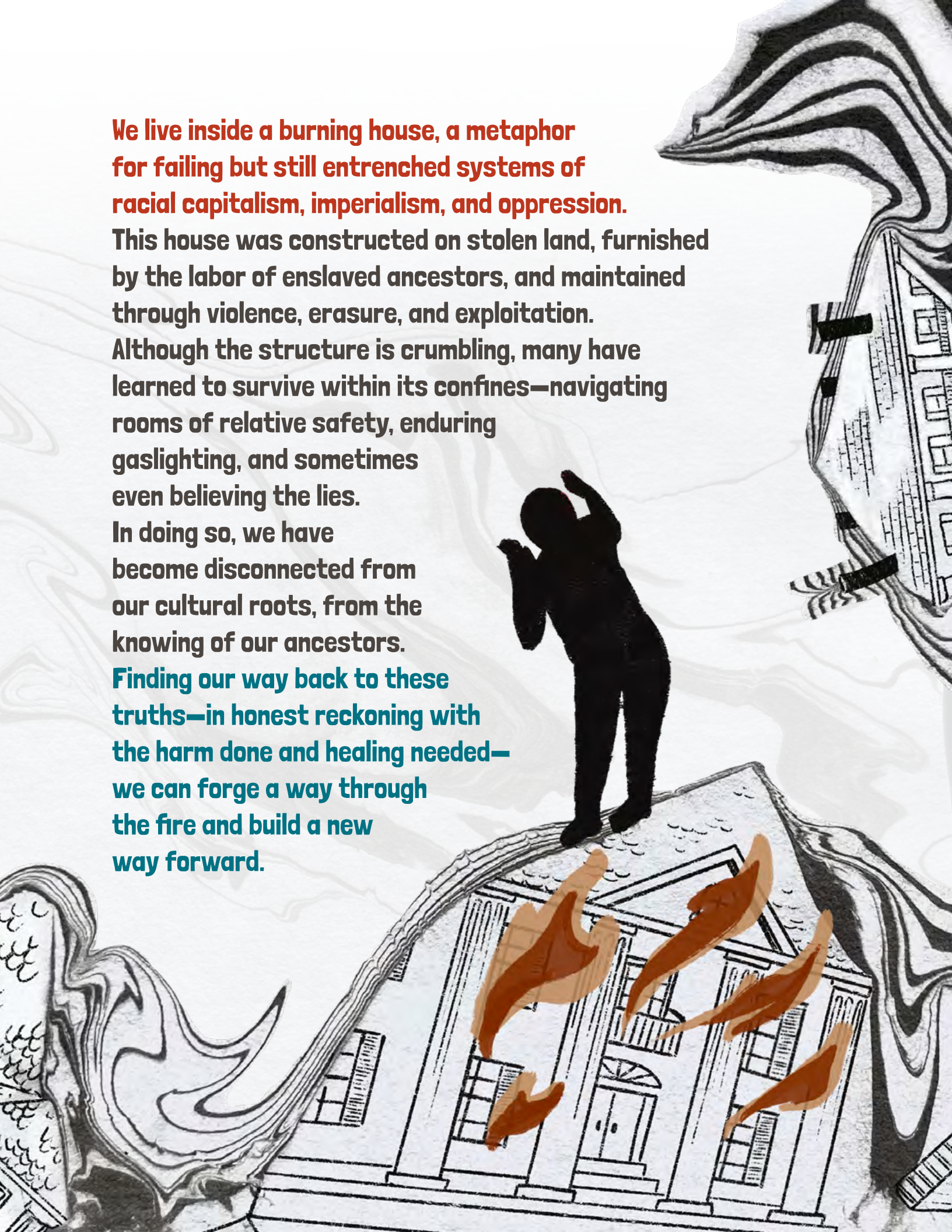
We live inside a burning house, a metaphor for failing but still entrenched systems of racial capitalism, imperialism, and oppression.

This house was constructed on stolen land, furnished by the labor of enslaved ancestors, and maintained through violence, erasure, and exploitation.

Although the structure is crumbling, many have learned to survive within its confines—navigating rooms of relative safety, enduring gaslighting, and sometimes even believing the lies.

In doing so, we have become disconnected from our cultural roots, from the knowing of our ancestors.

Finding our way back to these truths—in honest reckoning with the harm done and healing needed—we can forge a way through the fire and build a new way forward.



Key Themes

Transforming Self

TO

Transform the World

and Calls to Action

Divesting from the System's Definitions

One of the most revolutionary acts we can take is to stop measuring ourselves by oppressive metrics. When we refuse to define our worth through colonial logics, we reclaim our personal and collective power. This paper invites us to ask: Who benefits when we fail to love ourselves? The answer is clear—those invested in maintaining oppression.

The Power of Love and Radical Imagination

Love is not passive, it is a radical force that can dismantle oppressive structures. In the first brown paper, *Measuring Love*, we discussed how our ways of knowing have been delimited in the current racial and capitalistic hierarchy: where head knowing and only that which can be counted and transacted is valued, while heart, body, and spirit knowing are diminished or dismissed. To fully embrace the power of love toward liberation, we remember our enslaved African ancestors who had to endure living hellscapes every waking moment to dream of a freer tomorrow for their descendants. We remember the slaughter of millions of our Native relations, their sacred ceremonies to honor and steward the earth, and the fact that they are still here, fighting for land rematriation and a return to Indigenous ways. We remember the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the incarceration of 120,000 people of Japanese American descent in ten concentration camps across six states in 1942. What is happening today is a repeat of this country's many age-old attacks on the "other," institutionalizing degradation and rationalizing oppression by stoking fear, chaos, and finger-pointing. We must remember, re-member (Anzaldúa), and find strength in the love that has always made our people's survival possible.

Love as a Revolutionary Act

Love is not merely sentimental, it is an act of defiance against oppression. In times of heightened authoritarianism, cultivating radical self love and community care becomes essential. This paper reminds us that we are not defined by how white supremacist systems perceive us; rather, we shape our own narratives by honoring our beauty, our strength, and our right to exist unapologetically.

This is a deliberate, loving choice: to be for ourselves or to participate in our own oppression—there is no middle ground.

This reframing is deeply connected to the concept of embodied self-respect, claiming our truth, our stories, and our boundaries as sacred. Through practices such as self-care, storytelling, and honoring ancestral wisdom—mindfulness that engages our bodies and our spirits as one—we create space for healing and transformation. We refuse to accept external definitions of success, worth, or legitimacy from those who do not love us.

We must engage in practices, like those below, that help us deepen our capacity for truth-telling, meaning-making, imagination, and healing.

- **Storytelling and story listening toward the elevation of our own narratives**
- **Embodiment tools with cultural foundations, such as tai chi and capoeira**
- **Feeling Wheels, which invite us to deepen our emotional literacy, pause, and mindfully name our feelings**
- **Radical imagination exercises, such as guided visualization**

These are just a few examples of devices that equip us to reclaim our agency and construct new ways of being and acting. More tools and resources can be found at the end of this paper.

While we were writing this paper, the hell fires happened in Southern California and a historic Black community was burned to the ground. We see it is a timely metaphor for the power of community rising from ashes...

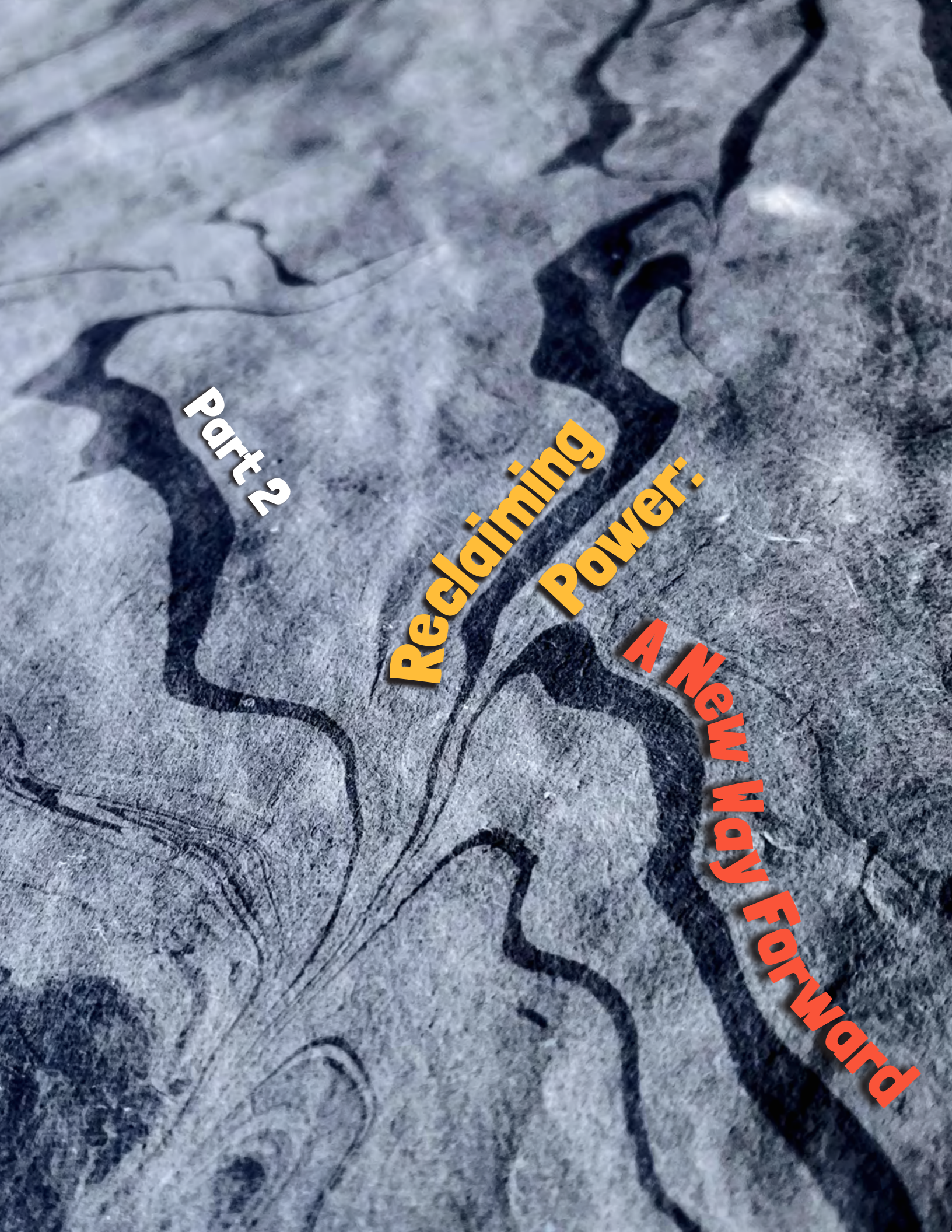
**Altadena, CA in
February 2025—entire**

neighborhoods that are now just gone.

The truth few knew is that many of the homeowners there are legacy homeowners occupying homes that have gathered wealth over 2–3, even 4 generations. Up in smoke and ashes. My nephew and his family tragically lost their home, too. But you know what survived? The tight-knit community of Black folks absolutely committed to rebuilding together. Some of them are still trying to figure out HOW they will do it (and the calvary, per usual, is not coming), but they are locking arm-in-arm with the rest of their community and fighting on. Just as we as a people have done so many times before. The fire didn't kill them, and it cannot kill their spirit of community. The most powerful force for our survival was is and always will be a community of folks who know their collective power and love themselves enough to demand better.

LOVE+POWER.

—Audrey Jordan



Part 2

**Reclaiming
Power:**

**A New Way
Forward**

**"The fight for liberation
is a fight rooted in
love—for ourselves,
our communities,
and our future."**

—Assata Shakur

Key Points

- It is a conscious choice to accept, or reject and replace, status quo definitions of power.
- We can and must derive our collective power from the examples of our ancestors, and from that which builds collective love+power.
- We define our power.

Key Questions

- When was I last in "Power-Over" mode? What was I trying to protect?
- How do I show up when I feel safe to share "Power-With" others?
- Where is my "Power-To" create something new calling me today?



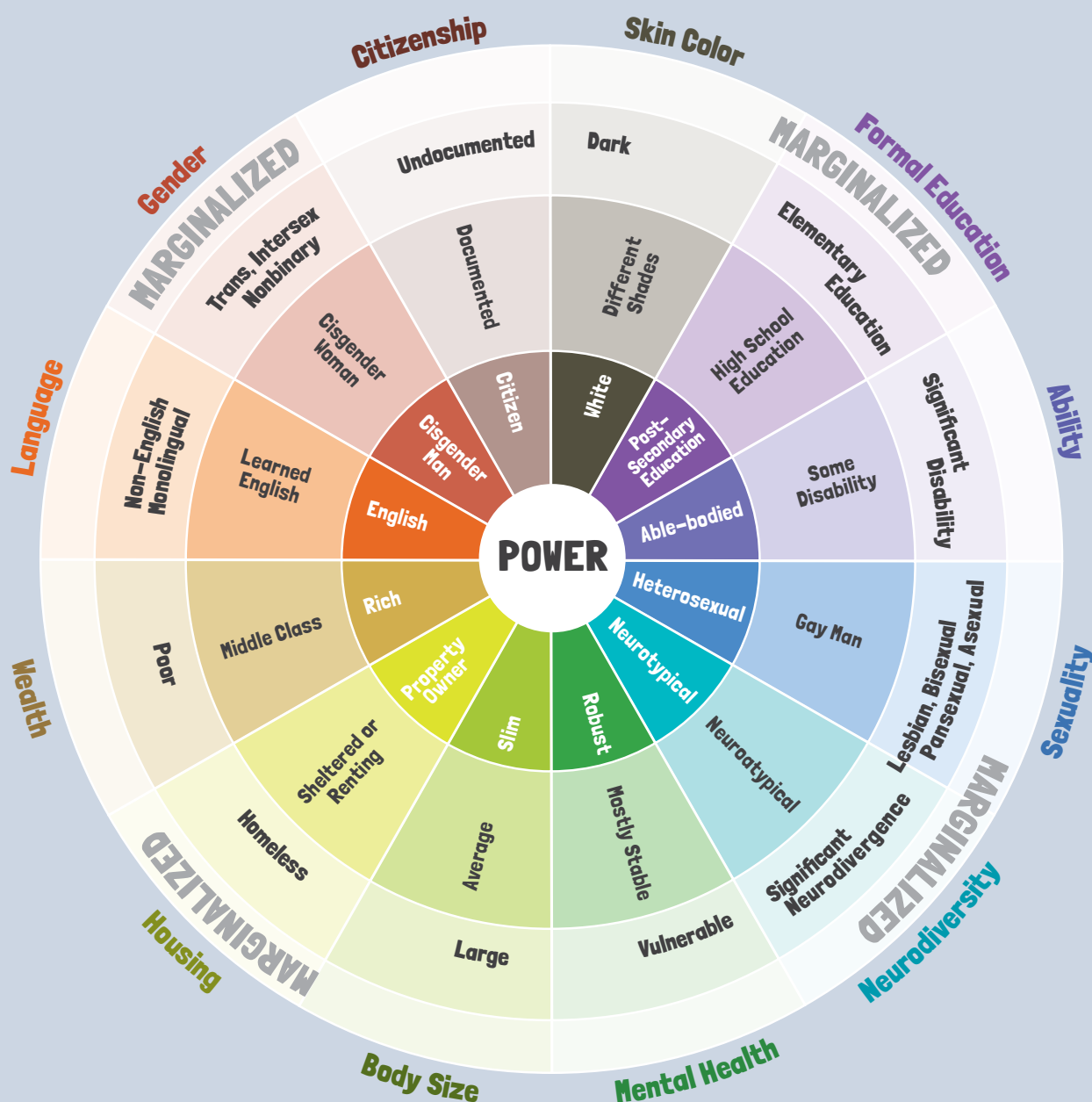
Still image from the documentary film
"The Eyes of the Rainbow/Ojos del arco
iris" directed by Gloria Rolando, 1997.

New Definitions of Power

We call for a radical shift in how we understand and exercise power. We urge us to reject oppressive worldviews and build new systems from worldviews rooted in liberation, integrity, and collective well-being. The metaphor of the burning house represents the failing systems of racial capitalism, imperialism, and entrenched oppression—systems that have defined our lives but do not serve our collective future. While the fire consumes the old world, we have an opportunity to forge something new from within it.

One of the most fundamental choices before us is to divest from dominant power structures that dictate how success, worth, and legitimacy are defined. Historically, marginalized communities have been forced to measure their value through colonial logics: economic wealth, hierarchical status, and proximity to whiteness.

• Wheel of Power/Oppression •



Adapted from James R. Vanderwoerd ("Web of Oppression"), and Sylvia Duckworth ("Wheel of Power/Privilege")

This chapter calls on us to break free from these imposed standards and recognize that our power is not rooted in domination, but in the assets we already hold:

- **Cultural Capital** – The wisdom and traditions passed down through generations.
- **Time and Labor** – The energy we invest in building something new, which is not absconded or appropriated to enrich others.
- **Attention and Energy** – The focus we bring to our collective liberation while not being distracted by orchestrated diversions or mis- and dis-information.
- **Love** – The radical love we have not just for self, but for our co-sojourners, communities, and movements.

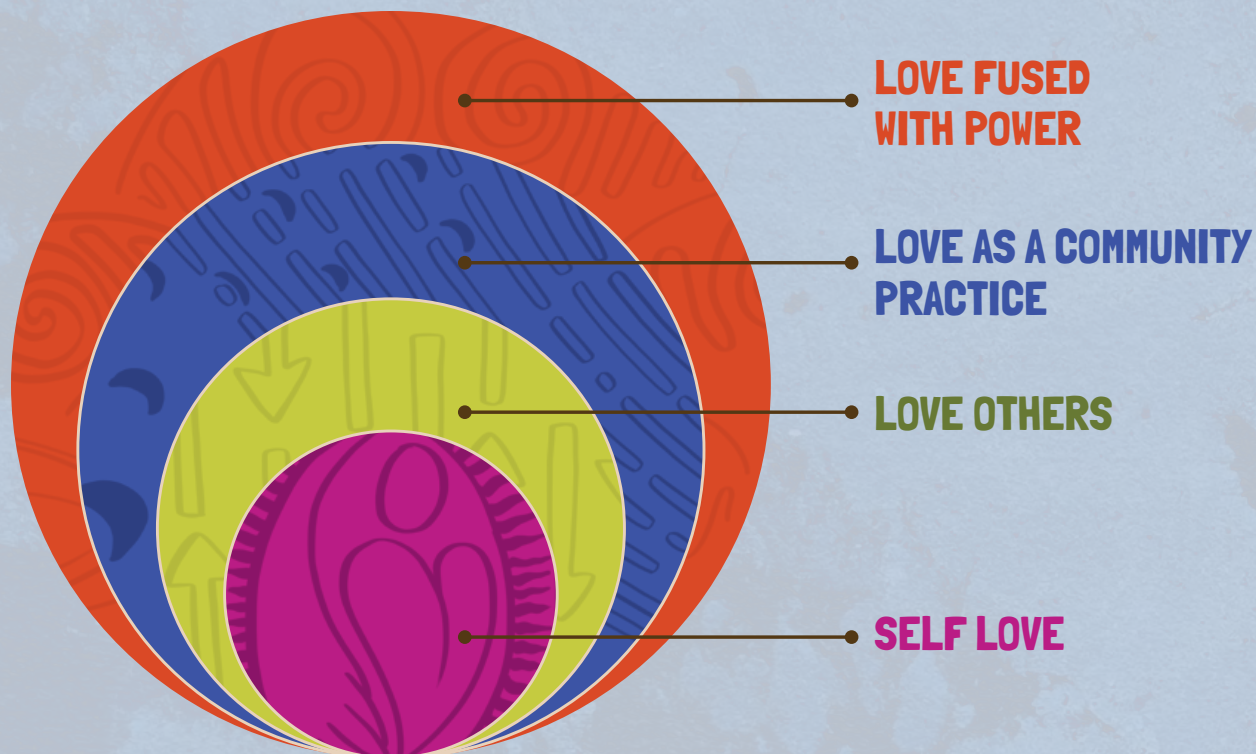


The challenge now is to strengthen networks, bridge movements, and build shared tools for our collective use that transcend old paradigms.

A New World Emerging from the Fire

While the existing systems are collapsing, new worldbuilders are actively creating spaces of liberation. Yet, these practitioners are not yet fully connected; the work remains fragmented. The challenge now is to strengthen networks, bridge movements, and build shared tools for our collective use that transcend old paradigms.

As we stated in our first brown paper, **love is a verb**. It's an action. We can't just call for a beloved community, we have to BE a beloved community, through our behaviors toward ourselves and others. The action of loving others begins with radical self love, rippling and extending out to loving others, loving as community practice (whether school, family, neighborhood, organization, etc.), and ultimately fusing our love with power.



From our first brown paper *Measuring Love in the Journey for Justice*

It is alarming how many organizers, advocates, and direct service warriors—in social and racial justice organizations, in movements for peace and climate justice, in all kinds of justice-loving spaces—still don’t see themselves/ourselves as having power. This is a big deal. It’s a huge power gap between where we are and where we long to be.

We need to build power so we can move toward everything we want: justice, healthy systems, love for all, liberation from caste and extraction.

So, it begs the questions: Why do so many social justice leaders shy away from owning that they have power? From holding power? Why do leaders build power in and/or with the community and then switch to wielding power-over? We believe the answer can be found in a lack of consciousness about the choice to be complicit with, or disruptive of, systemic oppression where power-over others reigns and other forms of power are not actualized.



Power-with is a very necessary anecdote to the sickness power-over/hierarchy often produces. Shared leadership/collective genius enables a more holistic approach to any task, project, or even relationship. It helps support a more diverse perspective that can yield amazing results in whatever the endeavor is. Collaboration>competition.

How it shows up in today’s world is in organizations like Highlander’s Seeds of Fire that priorities communal learning in a spirit of intergenerational organizing, participatory action research, etc. They believe no matter what age, generation, or class, anyone can learn no matter how much they know. Even our leaders/managers of program explicitly said to us we work together (power-with), it’s not I make yall do anything (power-over).

—Rahsaan Smith, Morehouse Class of 2025



• Power: Reclaimed and Redefined •

TYPE OF POWER	DEFINITION	HOW IT SHOWS UP IN OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS	HOW IT CAN BE RECLAIMED IN LIBERATORY PRACTICE
POWER-OVER 	Domination; winning and losing, zero sum; control over people, resources, or decisions	Silencing, hierarchies, gatekeeping, punitive policies, coercion	Accountability with care: leadership becomes facilitation, and calls for accountability become openings for growth and repair.
POWER-WITHIN 	Recognition and unleashing of one's special talents and agency to make a difference in the world	Feelings of an imposter; questioning self; sorted and channeled into labor for capitalists; repressed & sanitized self expression	Claiming our birthright to use and hone our power; sometimes it takes others to see it in us first to know it's there.
POWER-WITH 	Collective strength and mutual support; power sharing—my power and your power together is our power	Tokenism co-opted into "diversity panels" or symbolic inclusion, performative harmony	Co-creation and co-holding of power: collaborative organizing, coalition building, shared leadership models
POWER-TO 	Capacity to create, transform, and heal; a commitment to fighting for everyone being able to have opportunity, access, nice things	Black and Brown leaders up in front "isn't that great" is window dressing—who controls resources doesn't change	Liberatory imagination and embodiment: art-making, community care, mutual aid, creative collective resistance

Adapted from <https://iacp.berkeley.edu/change-analysis/power-analysis>



The collective challenge in front of us is to build our own vision and truth from inside the burning house while we work to transform it.

We are faced with critical choices:

- 1. Divest from oppressive structures** and refuse to uphold colonial narratives.
- 2. Create and reclaim tools** that embody liberation, rather than domination.
- 3. Expand definitions of success and power** to reflect values rooted in living systems.
- 4. Hold onto hope as a superpower**, knowing that transformation is possible even amidst destruction.

A burning house can feel deceptively like a home, even safe, because it is familiar. It is what we know. But now is the time to gather our resources—love, dignity, time, energy—and step forward into a new reality. We are not trapped, we do not have to stay. We define our future.

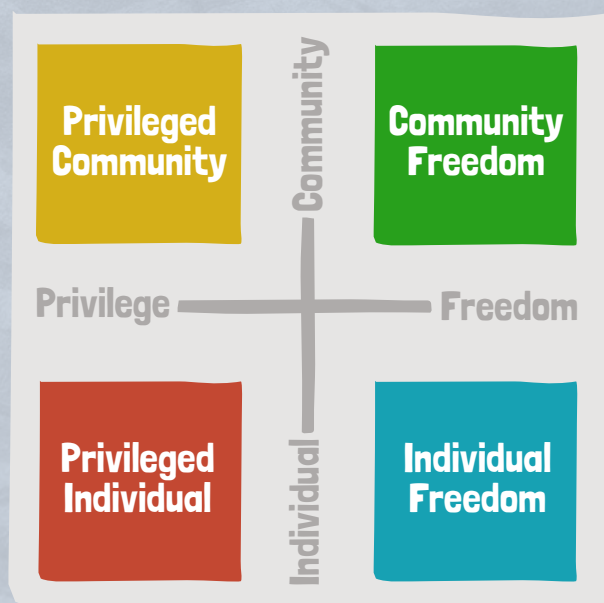
Choice as a Form of Resistance

We propose examining two axes as we build a beloved community:

- 1. Privilege vs. Freedom** – Understanding the dynamics that shape our positionality in navigating structural oppression.
- 2. Individual vs. Community** – Balancing personal agency with collective responsibility in our striving for well-being and liberation.

On the X-axis are privilege (left) to freedom (right); on the Y-axis are individual (bottom) to community (top). We now live in a world where there is a privileged community (top left box) led by a regime that abuses power to ensure that some are in that community while all others are out. Part of what sustains this regime is a worldview held by its inhabitants that privileges accrue to individuals and that freedom is experienced by individuals (the two bottom boxes). Our dream—our goal for transformation—is for the worldview to be about community, and for freedom (not privilege) to be everyone’s experience (top right box).

We are making an urgent distinction between privilege and freedom, highlighting how oligarchs and elite power structures concentrate wealth at the expense of the collective. Capitalism teaches that power is scarce, requiring winners and losers. That worldview protects privilege but denies true freedom, reinforcing systems that exploit marginalized communities while celebrating unchecked individualism.



The path forward to community, where all experience freedom, requires conscious, collective resistance:

- 1. Radical integrity** – Standing firmly in our values despite systemic pressure to conform.
- 2. Community-defined success** – Creating new metrics based on justice, healing, and shared prosperity rather than material wealth.
- 3. Power built with love** – Using power not as a mechanism for control, but as a force for transformation.

Building the Future While the House Burns

The collapse of oppressive systems does not mean liberation is guaranteed—it must be actively built. This paper highlights the necessity of collective worldbuilding, recognizing that while liberatory practitioners are already forming networks of transformation, movements remain fragmented.

To close the gap between isolated efforts and widespread change, we must:

- **Develop interconnected strategies** that unite grassroots movements.
- **Expand definitions of leadership** to amplify voices traditionally marginalized.
- **Strengthen internal accountability** to avoid reproducing cycles of harm.



Key Themes Reclaiming Power: A New Way Forward and Calls to Action

An Invitation: Defining Ourselves, Not Being Defined

The call to action in this paper is clear: we are not passive victims of oppression—we are architects of liberation. The fire may consume the outdated structures of racial capitalism, but within the flames, we hold the materials needed to build anew.

By reframing power, embracing radical self love, honing mutually beneficial and accountable love practices, and forging movements that uplift rather than dominate, we step into a future built on freedom, dignity, and justice for all.

Starting with the self, we ask: What is your source of power, that special way of engaging and using your power that is uniquely yours?

Is it:

- being able to synthesize ideas into a coherent narrative?
- connecting mind and body through somatic expression?
- spiritually communing with nature and representing that communion through art?
- some other artistic expression that channels meaning beyond words through dance, song, sculpture?

These are some of the different ways that we see and express our power. And the amplified beauty of us supporting each other to lean into our individual power is that, when we combine them, we co-create and magnify our collective power for transformation—and in so doing, we transform ourselves. A famous quote from Angela Davis further emphasizes the value of this kind of communal experience. When asked when she felt the most free, her response was: *“I think that I feel most free when I am in the presence of great art with others. When I’m at a concert, hearing amazing music, and aware of that fact that I am in community with others who are having pretty much the same feeling. I think art teaches us how to feel free, how to feel free even as we are compelled to live under conditions of un-freedom.”*²

Find more tools and resources for exploring self and power at the end of this paper.

2. Davis, A. (2020). *Seize the Time*, pg90. Hirmer Publishers. Angela Davis—*Seize the Time* exhibition, Zimmerly Art Museum (Sept.2021-June 2022).

Part 3



Pairing *Love*
and Accountability
Through *Conflict*

Key Points

- Capitalism has succeeded in pitting most of us against each other: competing for visibility, legitimacy, volunteers, profile, and funding in a zero-sum, scarcity-dominated game.
- I embrace my power with love as I engage with you. Even when, and especially when, we don't see eye to eye.

Key Questions

- How do we hold ourselves together as a WE (what does it mean to practice liberation) in times of rising authoritarianism?
- How is what I'm doing getting us more free?
- What if conflict becomes a generative path to building power?

Conflict as a Catalyst for Transformation

Conflict, when viewed through the lens of oppressive systems, is often seen as destructive, something to be “managed,” resolved, or suppressed as quickly as possible. In contrast, this chapter reframes conflict generatively, as a source of creativity, evolution, and movement-building.

When we avoid our differences in values, perspectives, or lived experiences, we miss opportunities to work with **conflict as a love language**. Conflict is an essential collaborator to our liberation—it allows us to refine ideas, strengthen bonds, and challenge old paradigms that no longer serve us. When we navigate conflicts with intention, they become invitations to growth, allowing communities to:

- **Deepen understanding** by engaging fully rather than retreating into silence or resentment.
- **Expand collective knowledge** by welcoming diverse experiences and approaches.
- **Forge new pathways forward** by building solutions through dialogue rather than division.

Conflict is not the enemy. Our discomfort with conflict, and the way systems condition us to fear it, are the true barriers to transformation.

White Supremacy's Suppression of Conflict

One of the central arguments in this paper is that white supremacist systems shape how we perceive and react to conflict. White supremacy enforces rigid binaries:

- **Right or wrong**
- **Winner or loser**
- **Good person or bad person**

These limiting frameworks are designed to discourage nuanced, multi-dimensional thinking, making people afraid to challenge power structures or engage in complex dialogue. Conflict, within this model, is something to be managed, avoided, or silenced rather than harnessed for transformation.

Capitalism reinforces these oppressive dynamics by encouraging competition, scarcity mindsets, and hierarchy—pitting movement leaders against one another for visibility, funding, or legitimacy. It manufactures conditions for conflict amongst coalitions and fuels avoidance and dissociation in response. Instead of working in solidarity, people are often drawn into lateral violence and false battles that serve only to weaken collective efforts.

To disrupt this dynamic, we must:

- **Reject zero-sum thinking** – liberation is not about one person winning while another loses.
- **Embrace fluidity and complexity** – conflict does not mean opposition, it means engagement.
- **Challenge inherited norms** – silencing discomfort benefits existing power structures rather than creating change.



**By refusing
to uphold
oppressive
conflict-avoidant
systems,
we reclaim our
ability to question,
disrupt, and
transform
rather than
conform.**

I got into the Lyft and it was a nice clean Tesla SUV, with a driver in a camo jacket, a white man with a full beard. Although he was polite in his greeting I thought – umph! Trump–Musk fan. He asked me how was my day, I said fine. Not really interested in talking to him much. He asked me if I was headed out for work or leisure, I told him work. One word answers. But then it hit me, maybe I can have a conversation with this guy? I was curious so I asked tentatively – how he liked driving his Tesla. He said he loved it. I proceeded to ask if he was catching grief about driving it these days. He said once in a while he'd get the 1-finger salute from someone he was driving by on the street, but other than that he hadn't noticed anything. It felt like I could risk it so I said although I don't condone the ugliness some people are showing by physically marring folks' Teslas just because Elon Musk is the CEO, I understood the anger. He said he did too! I was surprised and told him I didn't expect him to say that and that I felt like maybe we could go a little deeper into this conversation. I said that it is not right for an unelected billionaire to be brought into the government and take a chainsaw (which he thinks is a funny joke) to people's jobs and have unfettered access to all our information and people are angry – I am angry about it. He said he is angry about it too – it isn't what he voted for. He does believe that there is too much government waste, he does believe that the immigration problem is out of control, he does believe there is too much corruption among politicians, and he doesn't think men should compete against women. And he thinks Trump has the right ideas, but is going about things in the wrong way. He wants people to have a fair shot – all people – and he wants people to learn to talk together like we are all Americans wanting the same things.

By the time the ride was over, we were saying pleasant, genuine goodbyes and good lucks to each other, and that we were glad we risked having the conversation. I was surprised that we were able to have a decent conversation when I thought we were on different "sides." Clearly, a lot of disunity and tribalism is being manufactured these days. However, division and incivility is a choice.



–Audrey Jordan



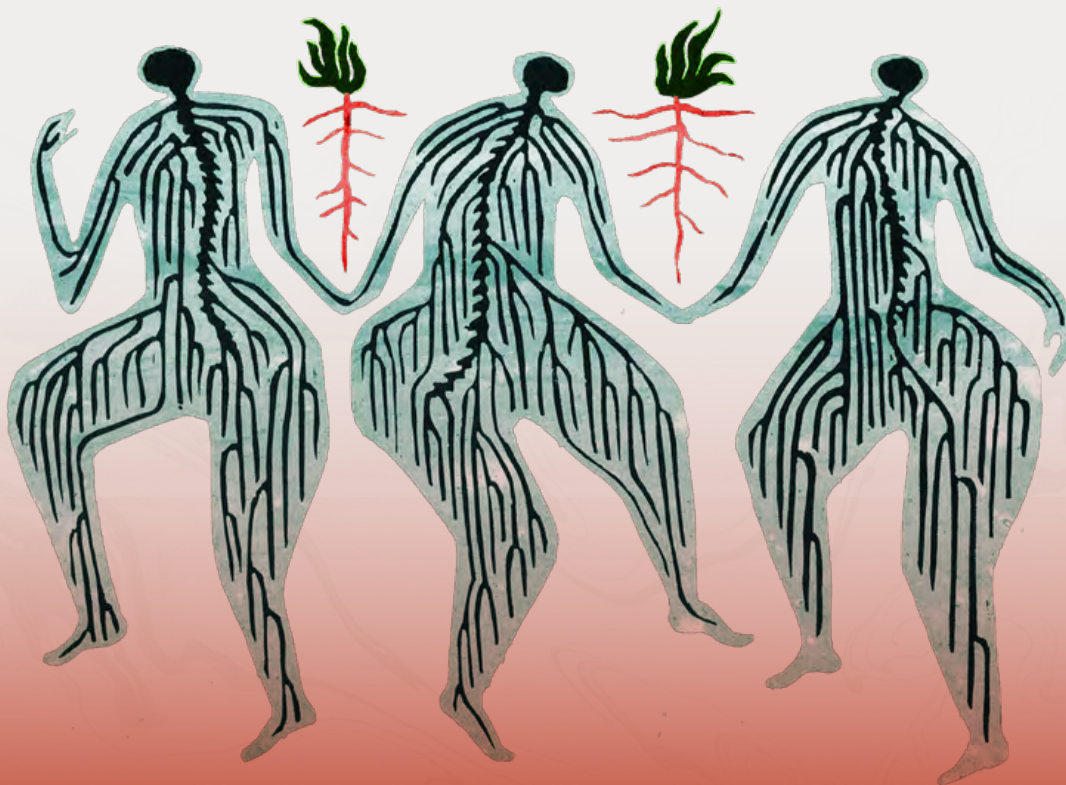
Power & Consent: Choosing A New Way to Engage In/Through Collective Power

We are calling for a new model of power, rooted in consent, mutual respect, and shared accountability. Many movement leaders hesitate to claim power because of the abusive ways power has historically been wielded—through domination, suppression, and violence.

We must reshape the narrative around power, recognizing that power is not inherently oppressive—it is the way it is used that determines whether it is harmful or liberatory.

Key shifts include:

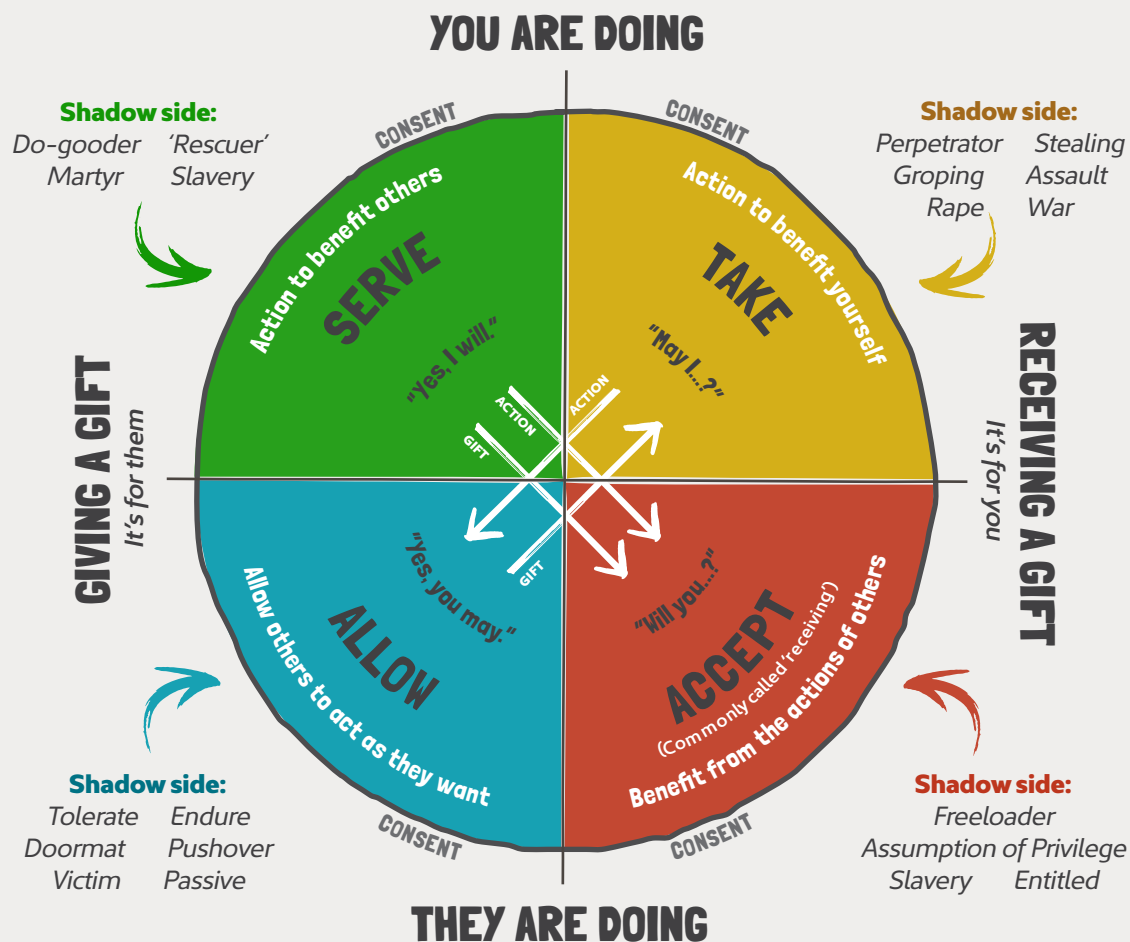
-  **From Power-over (domination)**   **To Power-with (mutual strength)** (DISCUSSED IN PART 2)
- From forced compliance**  **To informed consent and collaborative decision-making** (REFER TO THE WHEEL OF CONSENT, DISCUSSED FURTHER BELOW)
- From suppression of emotions**  **To emotional literacy and deep listening** (DISCUSSED FURTHER BELOW)



The Wheel of Consent

Consent is fundamental—not just in personal relationships, but in movement spaces, organizational structures, and power dynamics. When consent is prioritized, we shift away from coercion, manipulation, and forced participation toward practices that honor individual and collective agency. We can choose to conjure our shadow side and operate in coercion, manipulation, and forced participation/exploitation, or we can lean into our love+power side and engage in mutually beneficial decisions and actions that prioritize community and collective power. **We are human—we are shadow and love+power.** The question at our feet now is how to bring more conscious awareness to our responses to conflict. **The path from reactivity to conscious response is lined with liberatory power.**

• THE WHEEL OF CONSENT •



In any instance of touch, there are two factors: who is doing and who it's for. Those two factors combine in four ways (quadrants). Each quadrant presents its own challenges, lessons, and joys.

The circle represents consent (your agreement). Inside the circle there is a gift given and a gift received. Outside the circle (without consent) the same action becomes stealing, abusing, etc.

© Dr. Betty Martin | www.bettymartin.org | You are welcome to share, including this diagram, with attribution [leave this paragraph in].

The Wheel of Consent provides a tool for us to understand the relationships between what you are doing and what the other is doing, and what you are taking and what you are giving. What is inside the circle is agreement (consent) regarding what is serving, taking, allowing, or accepting. What is outside the boundary of the circle is outside of consent. Consent to and agreement about how we will be and what we will do is a first step to getting to and sustaining healthy accountability. This is, in our view, foundational to generative conflict—the kind of conflict that, although uncomfortable, we engage in in good faith to get to resolution and a clear, mutually accountable path forward.

**Despite what our culture tells us,
I cannot “hold you accountable.” Accountability
starts and ends with the self. I can support you to be accountable to
yourself, and then you can, by extension, be accountable to others.
Collective accountability rises by extension.**

➔ Some helpful questions are:

- **What would you hold yourself accountable to?** (Outline in behavior terms.)
- **How may I help you stay accountable to the goals you’ve set? How often would be most useful?**
 - **Determine if the support is:** **emotional** (listening, understanding); **intellectual** (providing the person with more knowledge, know-how); **spiritual** (offering encouragement, reminders of the person’s own innate brilliance and capacities); **physical** (perhaps asking to join them a couple times a week for walks).
- **What if you fall off the accountability wagon? What if you stop behaving / acting like you want to be supported to be more accountable? What would be helpful then?**

➔ Helpful tools for assessing whether or not entering into conflict is a loving move:

- **Are we values-aligned? Do you need me to shrink any part of my humanity to make you comfortable?**
- **Does the way we have framed this conflict require one of us to be right or wrong?**
- **What would it take for me and you to reframe this as generative? To what extent do we believe there’s a middle or third way?**
- **Can we each name how we feel in this “conflict” moment, which could shed light on what we each need?**



Conflict Is A Love Language

In love+power we are reframing how we engage with disagreement, moving away from avoidance or hostility into a mindset where conflict becomes a form of love and commitment.

In values-aligned relationships, conflict does not mean division—it signals care, investment, and a desire for deeper engagement. When people choose to remain in conversation, even through difficulty, it shows they are committed to co-creating solutions rather than walking away from each other.

Practices to embody conflict as a love language include:

- **Feeling all your feelings with your whole self before just reacting** – Resisting judgement and not deciding what is right or wrong, good or bad.
- **Establishing a consent dynamic** – Disallowing manipulation, coercion, threats at any scale, or other behaviors outside of the wheel of consent .
- **Holding strong but kind boundaries** – Setting clear expectations while maintaining respect. **Prentiss Hemphill** offers a practical definition of boundaries: “The distance at which I can love you and me simultaneously. Boundaries give us the space to do the work of loving ourselves. They might be, actually, the first and fundamental expression of self love. They also give us the space to love and witness others as they are, even those that have hurt us.”
- **Listening deeply** – Recognizing that discomfort does not mean attack, but an opportunity or growth.
- **Transforming rupture into healing** – Using conflict as a bridge rather than an ending.

Movement spaces must create rituals and frameworks that welcome conflict rather than suppress it. Whether through collective discussion circles, intentional dialogue practices, or mutual accountability structures, conflict can be held with grace and care instead of avoidance or punishment.



The dialogue of a capoeira game asks us: what if our conflict could be beautiful?

As a martial art with African roots and a legacy of successful resistance to the Brazilian plantation, capoeira as an embodiment practice has so much to teach us about using generative conflict to end colonial domination. As a dance and an art form, the two people playing a jogo (game) challenge each other to express themselves cleverly, creatively, and beautifully. As an extension of spiritual practice, it venerates the Orixas—archetypes who guide, care for, and protect the African diaspora and beyond.

I want to see more movement spaces call us into a roda, or circle, when we are in conflict. I want us all to clap out the same rhythm so we can stay in step with each other, and to sing call and response songs that harmonize our voices and speak guidance into the center of the circle. I want conflict to be brought right to the center of the community—ritualized with all eyes on it—watching two people hash it out in style and with respect for each other. I want us to see that instead of bracing for the impact of a kick, there is a more elegant move: to get out of the way and set yourself up to return a volley and keep the conversation flowing.

With all honor and respect to the gods, ancestors, and descendents of capoeira,
Cielo

The Role of Love+Power in Liberation

Ultimately, it is about the fusion of love and power as essential for collective liberation. Love is not passive—it is an active, strategic force for transformation. To rephrase MLK’s magnificent quote:

- **Love is what enables power to be wielded ethically.** Without love, power becomes coercive.
- **Power is what ensures that love is more than sentiment—that it becomes action.** Without power, love is ineffective as a tool for justice.

Together, Love+Power create the conditions for true justice, ensuring that movements are not only visionary but impactful, sustainable, and deeply rooted in care.



* When we engage in conflict with love and accountability, **power becomes something that expands possibility rather than enforces control.** This is the model that will sustain movements long-term, allowing communities to grow through challenges and not crumble under them.

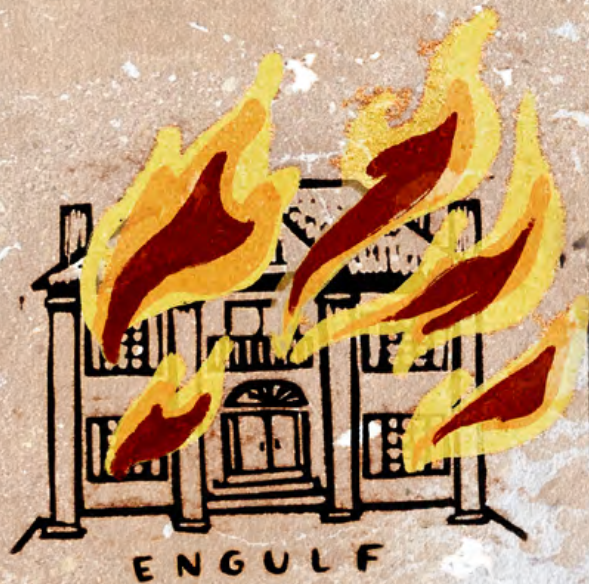
An Invitation: Holding Conflict as Sacred

In a world that teaches us to fear disagreement, embracing conflict as sacred work is a radical act. It pushes us to expand how we relate to one another, how we build movements, and how we define leadership.

By shifting conflict from something dangerous to something generative, we build a foundation for transformation rooted in love, consent, and shared power—a model that can sustain movements for justice far beyond individual battles or political cycles.



Part 4 Confronting Harm in Movement Spaces: A Call for Integrity and Accountability



"Healing isn't just about letting go of the past; it's about stepping into the future with new eyes, new boundaries and a new level of self-worth. What the old you accepted, the new you rejects—not from bitterness but from wisdom."³

—Vex King



Image adapted from The Bookseller author photo

Key Points

- Movement spaces are not the community spaces of love+power they must be.
- We can choose to disrupt movement spaces and get our own house in order.

Key Questions

- Have I been complicit in my own abuse?
- How might I be hoarding or safeguarding my own privilege, or am I really fighting for everyone's freedom?

3. <https://x.com/VexKing/status/1913329286318006689>

We pose a bold and necessary challenge to movement spaces: **if we are truly fighting for justice, we cannot ignore harm within our own ranks.** Too often, abuse, anti-Blackness, and misogynoir persist within activist communities—unchecked, excused, or even rationalized in the name of solidarity. The truth is stark: movements must practice the values they preach by ensuring that power is exercised with integrity and that harm-doers are called to account.



Image from Instagram: [Brianna Laren](#)

Naming Harm: The Cost of Silence

Movement spaces are often built on principles of solidarity, mutual care, and shared struggle—but that does not make them immune to harm. Injustice does not disappear simply because a group claims to be fighting oppression; it can still exist in who is protected, who is silenced, and who is ignored.

Far too often, survivors of harm—particularly Black womxn, femmes, and gender-expansive people—are met with skepticism, dismissal, or pressure to “keep the peace” when they speak out. This paper is clear in stating:

- **Harm must be named without hesitation** — silence enables abusers to remain in spaces of influence.
- **Comradeship does not absolve harm** — sharing values does not excuse violations.
- **Movement spaces must prioritize survivor safety** over the comfort of powerful individuals.

Ignoring harm does not preserve movements. It erodes them. The work of justice must begin within, demanding accountability **at every level.**

Anti-Blackness and Misogynoir: Confronting Systemic Exclusion

Even within spaces committed to racial and social justice, anti-Blackness persists, often in subtler but still deeply destructive ways. We name the ways this happens:

- **Black womxn and femmes are dismissed, tokenized, or excluded** from leadership and decision-making.
- **Language and behaviors that degrade Black communities** are left unchallenged, even among non-Black people of color.
- **Survivors of harm are pressured to “move on”** rather than have their voices fully heard.

Anti-Blackness is not just a problem within dominant white systems—it shows up within activist circles, demanding deep reflection and transformation. To build real equity, movements must center the most marginalized voices, ensuring that leadership is not just symbolic but structurally transformative.

Many of our movement spaces are still unconsciously adopting white supremacist cultural norms, such as: Robert’s Rules; respectability politics where we don’t admit or be upfront about our shortcomings; having a “professional” demeanor (don’t talk too loud, don’t dress too bright, don’t use slang, be sure to code switch and leave our cultural capital at the door, by all means be polite and keep feelings to ourselves... the list goes on). Our work is to lovingly call out those oppressive norms that we have lived with so long they have become invisible as dominating, and challenge ourselves to create a set of Love Ethics where we share power and exercise radical love for ourselves and each other.

An important part of uprooting white supremacy involves confronting anti-Blackness and misogynoir as it shows up not only in white people and white systems, but also in non-Black people of color, and through colorism, which is a global phenomenon.

Far too often, we respond reflexively to the discomfort of white people by making ourselves smaller. However, when we observe the discomfort of womxn of color, Black womxn in particular, let’s pause and ask, and listen deeply to what’s said. We are calling forth white and non-Black people of color to step up to the on-purpose work of eliminating white supremacy/anti-Blackness in our movements.

We will cultivate and use our power to address harm done in movement spaces because many of us spend the majority of our time here. It’s critical to name the harm being done and not allow predators and harm-doers to get away with their behaviors just because they’re “comrades” professing to share similar values as we. Some of us may know the sexual predators still allowed to exist in

movement spaces. We have seen and experienced anti-Black behaviors and language that may be conscious, unconscious, or born from ignorance. We have been in spaces that are misogynist, belittling of femme-identified love warriors and particularly destructive to Black womxn.

When Shiree first spoke up about the sexual predator behaviors of a movement activist who was considered a “darling” and righteous outspoken leader, her then-roommate, who also suffered sexual harms from this person, said, *“Why pick on a Brown brother who’s leading the movement? And what do you expect? They all do it [sexual harm]...”*

Just because you’re in the movement doesn’t mean you’re a person who’s accountable to the justice values of honor, truth, respect for womxn, or love. Just because you’re a womxn doesn’t mean you will stand on the side of calling out those who are doing harm to your sisters, comrades, beloveds, or yourself.

Did you know?

At a time when everyone was telling Black Women to fight harder, push more, do more. She taught them that we were already enough. That sometimes power isn't in the pushing, it's in the being.

Our ancestors didn't just teach us how to fight. They taught us how to be still, how to find joy, how to create beauty in dark times.

You don't have to carry every battle. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is remember that you are already what the ancestors dreamed of and that's enough.

Image from Instagram: [Najmah Ahmad](#) / [Freed Black Girl](#)

Power Must Be Exercised with Integrity

Power, when wielded without accountability, mirrors the same oppressive forces that movements seek to dismantle. This chapter calls for:

- **A shift away from hierarchy and unchecked authority.**
- **Structures for survivor-centered accountability.**
- **A culture where speaking out against harm is supported, not suppressed.**

This is not about punishment. It is about ensuring that power is held ethically, transparently, and with radical care. In situations where people wield power without love, the move towards balance is to restore a love ethic.

We're all, at times, complicit in our own suffering. Shiree did not speak about her sexual harming experience for another twenty years. Finally, when Shiree did tell her story, who knows how many others had suffered at that predator's hands.

**When we're honest,
most if not all of us have witnessed harm being
caused and perhaps said and done nothing. We must ask ourselves:
Why is this happening? How are we, who say we are activists, justice-seeking
warriors, remaining silent when we see, hear, or feel harm
being done to others in
our presence?**

These are the moments when we need to ask:

- **When I am focused on freedom, not hoarding or safeguarding my own privilege, what's the right thing to say or do at this moment?**
And what am I afraid of? What privilege will I lose if I speak up? Why am I willing to pay that price?
- **How is what I am about to say or point out furthering freedom for everyone?**
Whose voices might I organize to add to my own?
- **When anti-Blackness shows up in spaces we're in, how do we stop reinforcing their worldview by being anti-Black ourselves?** How do we support, speak out, ally with those being made less than? How do we help organize a greater avalanche to reverse these centuries-old behaviors that have oppressed and policed the behaviors, speech, and looks of Black people, especially Black womxn and femmes?
- **What do we do when our power threatens the system, or existing equilibrium in the movement?** (Look for their repression, agitation, resistance—those are signs that what you're doing is actually threatening the status quo.)

An Invitation: Movement Spaces Must Be Spaces of Justice

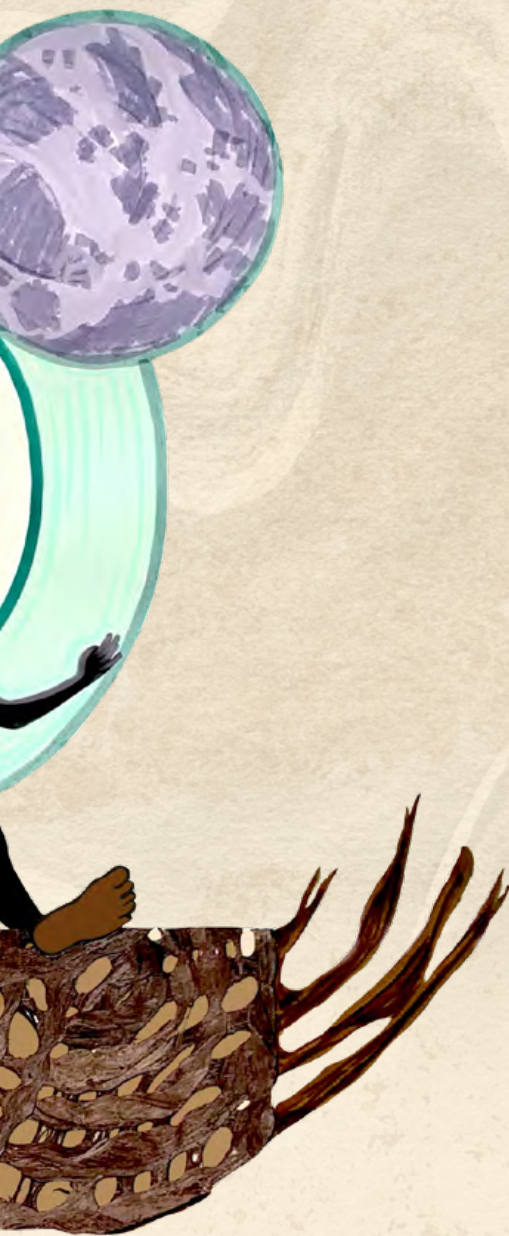
Justice is not just about challenging external systems—it is about holding ourselves accountable to the same standards we demand from the world. This paper offers a clear call:

- **Survivors must be protected, not silenced.**
- **Power must be shared, not hoarded.**
- **Harm must be addressed, not ignored.**

True liberation requires integrity at every level—in our policies, our relationships, and our collective vision. Without it, our movements will crumble under their own contradictions.

**Black woman You Are a Miracle Returning
may the echoes of those before you rise,
those who carried nations in their wombs,
who labored without rest,
whose brilliance was buried beneath duty,
May it. Be shouted onto the world that, "You are enough."
She does not enter—
she returns.
Root first, then flame.
Her presence is the unraveling
of lies too long called truth,
the loosening of knots
tied by centuries of forgetting.
Where others build walls,
she braids bridges—
across time, across sorrow,
across oceans where names were lost.
She does not ask for power.
She remembers it.
And in that memory,
she restores what the world
almost forgot:
that justice can be tender,
that softness can be strong,
that love is not a dream—
but a discipline.
Her breath is balm
for broken systems.
Her laughter a blueprint
for something freer.
And when she dances,
whole neighborhoods
remember how to live.**





**The world looks to her
not just for survival—
but for salvation.
Because she is not merely resisting.
She is reclaiming.
Reclaiming the sacred.
Reclaiming the story.
Reclaiming us all.
She is the quiet miracle,
the sacred interruption,
the gathering of what was scattered.
And if beloved community
is ever to be born—
it will come through the hands
of a Black woman
braiding what was broken
back into wholeness.
And if ever doubt comes knocking—
if the world forgets your name again—
remember:
You are a miracle returning.
To your breath.
To your beauty.
To the abundance you came from.
To the sacred you've never left.
And we—
we who come behind you—
rise steadier,
shine freer,
because
you remembered
who you are.**

—Justin Merrick



Part 5

Keeping Hope Alive

The Power of Faith and Love

in Worldbuilding



Key Points

- Hope is what we make it.
- Hope is our legacy and the baton in our hands for those who come after us.

Key Questions

- What are ways of keeping hope alive?
- Who can I build hope with?

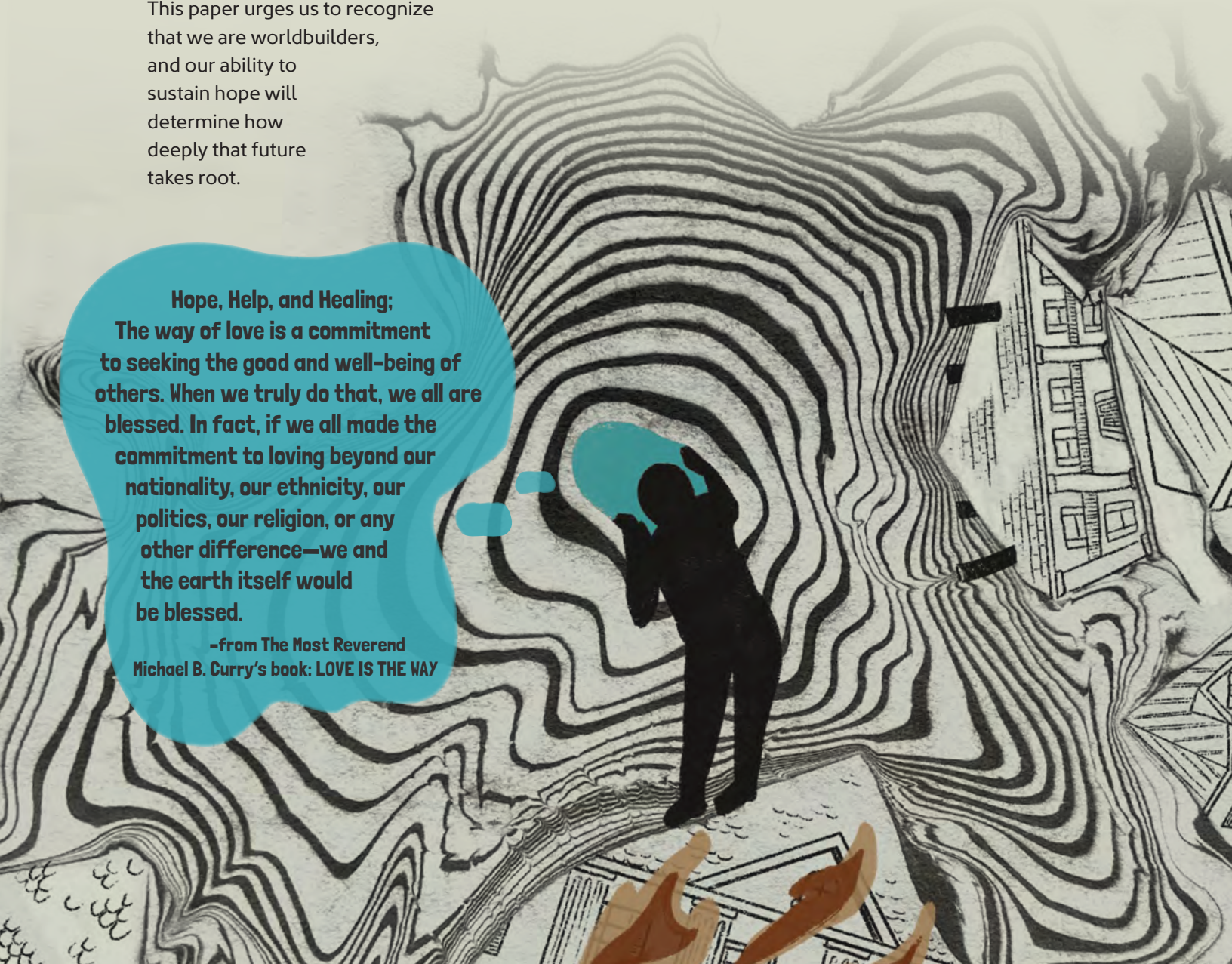
We must end the paper in hope. And so we offer both a reflection and a rallying call, reaffirming that hope is not simply optimism—it is a strategic force for survival, resistance, and creation. The house of oppression is burning, but that fire does not mean an ending. It means transformation. The new world is not ahead of us—it is already here, forming in small pockets of resistance, sustained through relationships, ritual, and collective vision.

While dominant systems work to fragment and exhaust movements, those of us committed to liberation are actively shaping a different reality—one moment, one space, one connection at a time.

This paper urges us to recognize that we are worldbuilders, and our ability to sustain hope will determine how deeply that future takes root.

Hope, Help, and Healing:
The way of love is a commitment to seeking the good and well-being of others. When we truly do that, we all are blessed. In fact, if we all made the commitment to loving beyond our nationality, our ethnicity, our politics, our religion, or any other difference—we and the earth itself would be blessed.

—from The Most Reverend
Michael B. Curry's book: LOVE IS THE WAY



Ashes of the American Dream Flames at the Foundation

**The house that my ancestors built is on fire
A spark started within lead to
Burning along the outlier
The flames are hot, the smoke is thick
It's hard to breathe
We cry & plead the ones to blame
Names on the deed
Don't write or read is what he said
They lit a match to leave us dead
The smoke curled quietly in the sky
No questions asked, no reasons why
We must stay strong & steadfast with ambition
Keep doing work without fair pay or recognition
Property doing what they're supposed to
Is the rationale in their cognition
Hate and greed are the ingredients
Of the wickedness that ignited the flames
Of this house being burned
How do we stop it?
Tears fill my eyes, but they're merely droplets
We need gallons
Gallons of water, communal tears
Collective healing from floor to ceiling
Wall to wall, please hear the call
The house has been burning for many years
This is not new at all**

Flames shrink and grow
Form changes with time
Love flows like water with waves and tides
Love keeps the house burning
Rather than burned down
Fire is a symbol of life
It dances in shadows, flickers in light
A hearth in the cold, a star in the night
Passion and pain twinned in its glow
It teaches us warmth, yet warns us to grow
Ashes don't mean endings—
They're proof that we've lived
Kindled by memory, by all we forgive
So let love blaze steady, not wild in despair
A flame that endures
because someone still cares

—Rahsaan Smith



The New World is Already Here

Hope is not passive. It is a daily, embodied practice. The liberation we seek does not exist solely in grand declarations or future aspirations—it is being built in the margins, in the cracks of empire, in the spaces where love and resistance live side by side.

Movement spaces must shift their understanding of worldbuilding from an abstract concept to a tangible reality that is already unfolding:



- **Windows, pockets, and portals** – The new world is visible in glimpses, in fleeting but significant moments where solidarity and care are enacted.
- **Spaces of radical possibility** – These are the rooms, gatherings, and relationships where transformation is not theoretical but actively practiced, lived, and sustained.
- **Micro and macro movements** – Whether through small acts of mutual aid or sweeping structural shifts, liberation is always being shaped.

Hope requires recognizing and nourishing these spaces, ensuring that the new world is not just imagined, but consistently nurtured and fortified.

Five Commitments to Keeping Hope Alive

We see five essential principles for sustaining hope in times of crisis, ensuring that movement spaces remain resilient, visionary, and deeply rooted in integrity:

- 1. Regenerate** – Hope requires action. Resistance is not only about challenging oppression, but about actively embodying new ways of living, organizing, and building. This means refusing to replicate harmful hierarchies, rejecting scarcity mindsets, and creating systems of care and abundance rather than cycles of extraction.
- 2. Sustain** – Liberation is a long-term commitment, and sustaining hope requires emotional, spiritual, and physical resilience. Movement spaces must honor healing and restoration as core components of strategies of reciprocity and well-being, building not only in urgency but with longevity in mind.
- 3. Promote humanity** – Hope must be rooted in radical dignity, ensuring that movement spaces do not replicate the very dehumanization they seek to dismantle. The work must center relationships, communal survival, and a deep commitment to seeing each other fully.
- 4. Embrace and cultivate love** – Love is not weakness, it is the foundation of transformation. Love fuels liberation—not as a passive sentiment, but as a radical, generative force that keeps movements grounded in joy, commitment, and possibility.
- 5. Worldbuilding** – The future is not an abstract dream, it is something we are actively shaping in the present. This commitment means recognizing that every gathering, every act of mutual aid, every moment of resistance contributes to liberation. The world we seek is not ahead of us—it is inside us, remembered and reimaged.

Hope does not mean that we ignore the fire, rather that we recognize the ways we control, shape, and harness it.

* New Recipes for Sustaining the Future

We elevate a set of practices designed to buoy hope, strengthen movement spaces, deepen resilience, and expand radical imagination:

- **Improvisation and Intuition** – Learning to trust our instincts, adapt, and respond creatively in uncertain conditions.
- **Decolonized Dreaming** – Visioning beyond the limitations of colonial frameworks, imagining futures rooted in abundance and care.
- **Ritual and Embodiment** – Honoring ancestral wisdom, grounding ourselves in practices that strengthen emotional and spiritual resilience.

Liberation is not only about structural change—it is about internal transformation, ensuring that we carry the new world within us, even before it fully manifests.

An Invitation: Commitment Over Comfort

The ultimate challenge is not whether hope exists—it is whether we are willing to commit to it. Hope is not just an idea, it is a practice. Keeping hope alive requires daily intention, deep resilience, and the courage to build, even when the world tries to convince us it's impossible.

- **Stay in radical love with each other** and keep pulling each other up.
- **Create community experiences** full of hope and joy.
- **Commit to something.** Name it. Make it public. Own it. Do it.
- **Generate joy, not comfort.** Liberation, not just visibility. Freedom, not just privilege.
- **Stay focused** – Avoid distractions designed to fragment and exhaust liberation efforts.
- **Stay visible** – Show up for each other without becoming targets of suppression.
- **Stay nourished** – Care for body, mind, and spirit as essential revolutionary acts.
- **Stay rooted in joy** – Joy is not a luxury; it is an act of defiance against oppression.
- **Stay accountable to a purpose** – Choose a commitment, make it public, and follow through.

The Crisis is Us Not Finding and Using Our Power

As we close, we offer the following table to help us simplify the choices before us. We see what is the “normal,” internalized, status quo choice in the left column and the choice for love+power (when we choose **us**) in the right column.

FREED BLACK GIRL PODCAST

The blueprint was never about fitting into their system. Our ancestors built beauty in the midst of horror, found joy in the face of terror. That's the legacy - *creation over reaction*.



Image from Instagram: [Najmah Ahmad](#) / [Freed Black Girl](#)

“NORMAL” WORLDVIEW (including that of philanthropy, nonprofits, academia, organizers)

LOVE+POWER WORLDVIEW

Separability of you and me (meritocracy, pull self up by bootstraps)	In’Lakech (you are my other me) Ubuntu (I am because you are)
Power over	POWER fused with LOVE
Conflict averse	Conflict among values-aligned folk is a love language, as it is generative friction
Avoid the “bad” feelings	Grief and joy are one cycle
Ending relationships	Cleanse Digest Compost
Break trust	Forgiveness
Individualism	We’re all relatives
Domination Control Abuse	Love for the land and Mother Earth as ancestors and living beings
We are worthy because of what we can produce People are resources to be used	We are not resources; we willingly bring assets and gifts to contribute

"NORMAL" WORLDVIEW
(including that of philanthropy,
nonprofits, academia, organizers)

LOVE+POWER WORLDVIEW

Self love = self soothing	Self love = radical transformation from the inside out I am who I say I am when you're not looking
Success is defined and measured by white domination terms	We define where we are going We do our worldbuilding based on values of healing and transformation
Reinforces white comfort as we fight for survival	Discomfort is OK; distinguish between being uncomfortable and being unsafe
There's one answer	Honor ancestors as teachers and guides, many lineages
Hoarding access and power	Cleanse Digest Compost
Break trust	Forgiveness
It's either the land or the people	Our healing is inextricable
Theories of Change and plans to predict the future	We accept the life and death cycle
Command and control	Non-linear process
Hyper-critical, exacting our sharp analysis on each other	Healthy boundaries
Judgemental	Radical self love
Extractive "experts" and funders, research, unidirectional	Praxis – action/reflection



The Fire Has Always Been With Us—And So Have We

We know, trust, and believe that our ancestors have always carried fire—not just the flames that burn oppression, but the embers of memory, endurance, and creation. Even in captivity, they braided seeds into their children's futures, ensuring that liberation was always possible, if not yet visible.

We are not starting from scratch. We are not starting from nothing. We are the latest keepers of an ancient fire, tasked with ensuring that it does not burn out. The new world isn't ahead of us—it's burning inside us, remembered and reimagined.

Tools • Resources • Recipes



We offer, with love, this collection of prompts for self-reflection and action. These tools are well suited to individual journaling (writing, drawing, collage, etc.) and can be adapted for dialogues with dyads or small groups/teams. If journaling, explore ways to make it joy-full journaling: a favorite notebook, a pen that feels great to write with, a rainbow of color pencils, a yummy snack or drink—whatever brings you joy.

→ **Knowing Yourself: Am I who I say I am when you're not looking at me?**

- **Who you think you are:**

- Who are you?
- Who do you pretend to be?
- Are you who you say you are when nobody's looking?
- Others see me as...

- **Who you are ready to be:**

- What old ideas of myself am I ready to release?
- Where in my body am I holding these ideas?
- How might I reframe and replace to shed a colonized me and welcome a more liberated me?

* **Resources: A few different approaches to exploring identity include:**

- Enneagram (start exploring at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enneagram_of_Personality)
 - Medicine wheel (start exploring at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine_wheel_\(symbol\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine_wheel_(symbol)))
 - StrengthsFinder (start exploring at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CliftonStrengths>)
 - Internal Family Systems Therapy's 8Cs and 5Ps (start exploring at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internal_Family_Systems_Model)
-

→ **Three Stories: Owning our Stories as a Source of Power**

Explore these three stories of your self:

- The first is the story of all of your names.
- The second is the story of your community (communities; born and chosen).
- The third story is the story of your gifts.

➔ **We Are All Capable of Incredible Light and Dark: Embracing Our Full Selves**

- **My light:**
 - My strengths...
 - My gifts, talents, and superpowers...
 - My practice...
 - How I renew...
 - **My dark:**
 - My shadows...
 - My darkest tendencies...
 - The worst thing I've ever done...
 - To what extent have I learned to forgive myself...
 - How / What I forgive myself...
 - How I forgive others...
-

➔ **Boundaries as Love: Having, Holding, and Communicating Clear, Kind, and Self-Loving Boundaries**

Uncovering trends and habits:

- What's my understanding of, and struggles with, setting clear, strong boundaries?
- What has helped? What hasn't helped?
- How have those impacted my work? What are some examples?

Exploring new ways of being:

- What's my why for having stronger boundaries?
 - To whom will I proactively communicate these boundaries? What's the core message?
 - What will I practice day after day?
 - Name your support and accountability circle
-

➔ **Communicating our Boundaries**

Explore these four parts of communication. How can each help you express yourself?

- I see...
- I think...
- I feel...
- I need...

*** Resource: "The Four Agreements," by Don Ruiz**

- Be impeccable with your word
- Don't make assumptions
- Don't take anything personally
- Always do your best
- (start exploring at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Four_Agreements)

→ Holding and Processing Grief: Enlarging Our Hearts to Feel

Joy and grief are on a spectrum. When we enlarge this spectrum, what happens?

- What has been my experience during COVID? What am I grieving?
- In the work setting, what are some of the things that you're grieving?
- What will support you to move through this grief?

*** Resource: The "Grief Cycle,"** as suggested by Kubler-Ross model: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance (start exploring at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_stages_of_grief)

→ Processing Our Trash: Claiming Lessons and Letting Go

What if we were to honor, even celebrate, what we have lost—to give our losses proper burials, that they may be composted and feed new insights, new skills, new ways of seeing and being in the world?

- Pick a piece of "trash" to sort out and process...
- Is what it needs right now an honorable burial?
- Can it be composted for nutrients (lessons)?
- Is it ready to be brought back transformed and alive?



→ What is the trash in your life that you need to compost?

- What choices did I make today that disrupted my own oppression? That disrupted my joy?
 - What are my stories that are about my power? What are my stories that are about my joy? Have I owned them? Have I named them?
 - How healthy are my boundaries? How strong are they? How well have I communicated them?
 - To what extent did I allow, invite, and practice joy today? What can I still do with the remaining minutes of my day?
 - What am I learning about my dark and my light today? How did I shine? How did I hide my light?
-

→ Moving from Grief to Joy: Recognizing Joy as Part of Being Alive

Making room in our hearts and giving ourselves permission to feel joy is part of decolonizing our love for ourselves.

These prompts invite you to explore: What brings you joy? How do you allow joy? What are enabling or disabling conditions for this joy?

- I see joy as _____.
 - For me, the opposite of joy is _____.
 - What makes joy different from happy is _____.
 - My relationship to joy is like _____ to _____.
 - _____ brings me joy!
 - _____ robs me of joy.
 - When I _____, I can access joy easier.
 - Often, my _____ gets in the way of me being joyful.
 - If I could _____, I'd have a clearer path to my inner joy.
 - If joy was my best friend, they'd ask/tell me to _____.
 - Right now, I'm grateful for _____ and _____.
 - How I want to invite more joy into my life:
-

→ Radical Love: Loving From the Root

**"Nothing is possible without love... for love puts one in a mood to risk everything."
-Carl Jung**

Radical love is: I'm learning / releasing / unlearning / re-learning... to love myself.

- How are you loving yourself radically?
- Who or what benefits when you don't love yourself?
- What if we all loved ourselves more radically?

→ A Tool for Responding to rather than Reacting to Difficult Situations:

The Four Chairs Exercise, adapted by Kaira Jewell Lingo from Peggy Smith's practice, "Where is am I?" in: Brown, Gomez, Lingo (2024), *Healing Our Way Home: Black Buddhist Teachings on Ancestors, Joy, and Liberation*. Parallax Press. This is one of several excellent tools in the book.

* Resource can be found at:

<https://annaakullian.wixsite.com/therapy/post/four-chairs-an-exercise-when-you-have-a-painful-exchange-or-are-annoyed-with-someone>

→ 12 DIMENSIONS OF LOVE

What is or could be a concrete example of you doing this?

SELF LOVE

- Conscious of how we're in integrity with our own values
- Critical analysis of our own thoughts and behaviors
- Self care as revolutionary acts of resistance

LOVE OTHERS

- Deep listening
- Compassion and understanding
- Forgiveness, chance to do over

LOVE AS A COMMUNITY PRACTICE

- Organize and develop leaders
- Spread vision and hope
- Fight for material change

LOVE FUSED WITH POWER

- Own and materialize our power
- Share power with
- Build power for collective liberation

→ Love At Work: Bringing Love to Our Work

Let's define, and redefine, what is "professional."

- When love AND professional are present, what's happening?

→ Liberation: Living in My Joy As Resistance to Oppression

"The only way to deal with the unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion." - Albert Camus

To serve equity, justice, and liberation, we need to shift from and to...

FROM	TO
Needing certainty and predictability	Holding complexity and comfortable with nuance
Needing the "truth" through whatever means, such as data	Accepting partial and multiple truths
Seeing conflict and disagreements as challenges to authority	Embracing conflict and disagreements as generative
Being the one(s) to decide	Being comfortable with participation, opinions, voice, messiness and a little chaos
Centering one way or traditional ways of knowing	Asking whose ways of knowing are centered and what gets to count

- What is one big or small move you can (are ready to) make to be more free?
- What costs are you paying to stay the same?
- What supports will you need? From whom? Be specific.



→ Step Into Joy As Part of Our Sacred Power: Recognizing the Revolutionary Power of Joy

Uncovering trends and habits:

- What's my understanding of, capacity to, and struggles with seeing joy as power?
- What's my relationship with power?
- How is my relationship similar to or different from power vs. success?
- How have I been more successful? How have I been less successful?
- What has helped? What hasn't helped?
- How have those impacted my work? Examples

Exploring new ways of being:

- What may be helpful reframes of my relationship with power?
- How do I want to relate to the power I do have?
- How might I wield my power when it comes to having and preserving joy as part of my power?



Image from Instagram: [Taij Kumarie Moteelall](#)

Some Tools for Guiding Documentation and New Narrative

At the Center for Transforming Communities in Memphis, TN, our team (through Audrey Jordan) has has the privilege of testing the application of the Measuring Love framework in real word settings. So far, four “valuator” cohorts have gone through the training/learning labs and the organization has expanded the narrative work through data forums and data walks with Memphis residents and community partner organizations. Following is a brief description of the trainings and the documentation we have developed to support it. Below that is a brief description of the data walks and narrative development work that CTC is evolving.

Measuring Love Valuator Cohorts

In small groups of 4–6 people, Audrey Jordan started training people who work in the Memphis neighborhoods to: 1) learn the components of the framework; 2) translate the application of the framework by using scaffolding (not prescription) from Audrey to their on-the-ground circumstances; 3) develop a plan and agree to use simple documentation tools to capture their observations and learning; 4) participate in a community of practice to synthesize and aggregate our collective wisdom; and 5) share the results of our learning with CTC staff and community. Although the cohort experiences were all different and took place at different times from 2022–2024, some common themes emerged:

- The framework is easily applicable to different settings on the ground and can be applied to different goals (aligned with the framework)
- The curriculum has to be adapted to fit the learning needs of the cohort
- The documentation tools are easily adaptable to various on-the-ground settings
- There is room for additional documentation to emerge representing the cultural expressions of people that get beyond rational thought (we called these cultural artifacts)
- The community of practice is crucial to open, transparent, adaptive learning and transformation—not only of the ways of engaging with focus neighborhoods with more love+power, but also, importantly, of the participants themselves (e.g., how they view their own power and influence; the bonds that are cultivated between and among them)
- The documentation can and does lead to shared meaning-making within the group, and self-determined narrative construction based in the voices and experiences of neighborhood residents

The simple tools we used (and developed) are:

- **Data documentation plan**—a summary detailing the people you will be engaging with, when and how, a timeline with milestones, the activities/events in which you/they will be involved, the questions you are asking, how you will capture the answers.
- **SOAP (Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan)** notes (similar to field or process notes)—example from <https://www.socialworkportal.com/free-templates/#Free-SOAP-Notes-Template>
- **Cultural artifacts**—these creative expressions included photos, videos, quotes, poems, and art forms that came out of the engagement.

For more detail about training content and tools, contact Audrey Jordan, audreyjordan2012@gmail.com.

The Measuring Love Team

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We want to hear from you!

Please get in touch and share feedback, suggestions or ideas—thank you!



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