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Mobile Futures Institute

A People's Guide to Imagining a More Just Future

jazzfuturesnow

2222. The afrofuture
Is light forever expanding

Multiplying realities
Mapping memory
Sounding a ritual
Returning
Backwards
To a time
when a mother
Birth us all
along with the sun
Exploding

A future
Handmade
Bare hands
Electricity and water
Mud and concrete
Pieces of the city
Spirits from the village
Blood from the offering
You you you

Ritual sounding fire against the sky
Blue blue Coltrane jazz
Blew blew AMIRI Baraka poetry
Who blew up the future
Yell low sun ra
Yell low Pharo
We are already after the afrofure
George Clinton on a mothership
Black quantum futurism
Nina Simone playing the piano
Black quantum futurism
Marcus Garvey on a spaceship back to Africa
Black quantum futurism
Alice Coltrane playing the sitar
Black quantum futurism

What does it mean
To stand in unity
In the afrofuture

Offering hearts
as technology
To power the time machine of
after
Before
Now

—Camae Ayewa

Visions for Decolonizing Futurity

Future

Rasheedah Phillips,
Republished from Keywords for Radicals

The word "future" designates a time period or temporal space that is not now, but that is situated ahead of us and is distinctive from times that precede the one in which we are currently situated. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, it developed out of Old French ("futur") during the late fourteenth century, when it denoted "a time after the present... yet to be." It derives from the Latin "futurus" via the stem "fu-" ("to grow" or " become"), which is the future participle of the word "esse" ("to be").[1]

Notions of the future—that which lies ahead—vary greatly. In traditional indigenous African spatiotemporal consciousness, time is experienced as a matter of "pacing" (akin to walking). Time begins when you arrive at your destination. African time also has a backwards linearity: when events occur, they immediately move backward to what John Mbiti (1990) calls "Zamani time" or "macrotime." All future events exist in "potential time" until experienced or actualized. These events do not depend on some specific clock time or calendar date; instead, time itself depends on the quality of the event and the person experiencing it. Once the future event is experienced, it instantaneously moves backward into the present and past dimensions. Those two dimensions bear the most ontological significance: "a person experiences time partly in his own individual life, and partly through the society which goes back many generations before his own birth" (Mbiti 1990, 17).

In contrast, traditional European spatiotemporal consciousness conceives of time as flow and inevitability. Abstract conceptions of time as a continuous duration first emerged during the fourteenth century, within the

[1] Both *"esse"* and *"futur"* share "be" at their root," which may explain why the word "be-fore" can both denote an event that has already passed and is now in the past, or an event that has not yet happened.

European Judeo-Christian order (Postone 2003, 203). In this context, Biblical apocalyptic visions of the end being near inspired strict regulation of work and prayer times.[2] As Jeremy Rifkin notes in *Time Wars*, "western culture has institutionalized its images of the future by way of religion and politics," making sure that "the future can be made predictable and controlled" (1989, 146–147). It is through religion and politics that a linear temporal orientation first came to be discerned, concurrent with the development of Western culture. The structure of time eventually came to be organized discretely and causally into a past, present, and future, with fixed events set against a forward moving timeline—one that would eventually come to a climactic, chaotic end. Born in northern Africa but buried in Italy, prominent religious philosopher Saint Augustine was among the first western thinkers to view Christianity-inspired, irreversible linear time as an important feature of his philosophy. In his *Confessions*, written in Latin around AD 400, Augustine asks, "How can...the past and future, *be*, when the past no longer is, and the future is not yet? As for the present, if it were always present and never moved on to become the past, it would not be time, but eternity" (1961, 264).

This progressive unidirectional future was subsequently consolidated through significant events in science and technology. As Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum notes, "Only since the scientific revolution in the middle of the seventeenth century can one speak of experimentally qualifying scientific procedures and conceptions of time as a scaled continuum of discrete moments" (1996, 287). The increased use of public clocks (and eventually of personal watches and timepieces) further inscribed a mechanical order of time, impacting all aspects of Western life.

Developed around 1854, the second law of thermodynamics reinforced the linear notion that time was speeding into the future toward a chaotic end. Meanwhile, significant temporohistorical events like the invention of the telegram and the construction of the first long distance railroads allowed people to conceive of the future in terms of conquest.

[2] According to the *OED*, the word "time" uncertainly derives from the word "tide" or "tidiz," derived from the Sanskrit word for "division," "to cut up" or "to food" (as in "the time of high water").

Considering the relationship between "the future" and imperialism and colonialism, Stephen Kern notes how the "annexation of the space of others" and the "outward movement of people and goods" amounted to "spatial expressions of the active appropriation of the future" (2003, 92). In 1839, British Foreign Minister Lord Roseberry noted that the motivations for colonizing Africa were not about the present, "not what we want now, but what we shall want in the future" (Kern 2003, 92). Roseberry viewed the future as something to be mined; he and his fellow imperialists were engaged in the business of "pegging out claims for the future" as trustees "to the future of the race" (92).

In the US context, both during and after slavery, "the future" offered a potential source of hope in the struggle against racial oppression. On July 4, 1852, abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass attacked the hypocrisy of Independence Day, observing that "America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future." Consequently, it was liable to commit the same atrocities it had inflicted against those it had enslaved against humanity more broadly. Decades later, in 1892, he told a group of Black students at Atlanta University: "Be not discouraged. There is a future for you and a future for me" (Hamilton 2002, 117). Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, ensured his followers that "we have a beautiful history, and we shall create another in the future that will astonish the world" (Garvey 2012, 6).

At the turn of the century, the avant-garde Italian social movement known as "Futurism" attempted to revolutionize notions of the future in art, architecture, literature, and culture. Believing that the reverential cult of tradition should die, they created manifestos, artwork, music, and critical theory to capture a future that was rapidly speeding toward them. Much like Einstein's relativistic future, the Futurists' future had run into *now*. Or, as Filippo Marinetti wrote in his *Manifesto of Futurism*, "Time and Space died yesterday" (1909). In the "Manifesto of Futurist Painters," Boccioni et al. (1910) declared that "the triumphant progress of science makes profound changes

in humanity inevitable." In their view, such changes were "hacking an abyss between those docile slaves of past tradition and us free moderns, who are confident in the radiant splendor of our future." They embraced a violent, clashing, chaotic, technological future—one that was constantly changing and perpetually at war with its own ideas. Because the future was transient, there could be no permanent buildings, monuments, or empires.

Notions of the future have virtually defined the modern day genre of science fiction. Following the Victorian era of wonder, space travel, and high technology, these future visions began to take on a dystopian tone. H. G. Wells spent much of his career time traveling into dystopian futures through fiction, essays, and speeches. Meanwhile, George Orwell's novel *Nineteen-Eighty Four* famously warned that "who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past" (1950, 37). The imaginations of science fiction writers have both been stimulated by and contributed to developments in science and technology. Indeed, many sci-fi writers are scientists, or are consulted by scientists when their work predicts the future or thinks up new possibilities and uses for technology. One inevitable consequence of the rapidly changing future envisioned by the Italian Futurists and illustrated by science fiction is what Alvin Toffler called "Future Shock": the "shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time" (1970, 11). According to Toffler, the greatly accelerated rate of social and technological change in our society produced mostly negative personal and psychological consequences, which arose from "the superimposition of a new culture on an old one" and produced a form of culture shock from which the victim cannot recover (11). This was what Marinetti and the Italian Futurists wished for: a "future now," permanently split from the past, and brought about by a violent expansion of the scope of change. For Toffler, we were racing too far into the future, too quickly.

The term "future shock" itself spread through popular culture, theory, and media after the release of Toffler's book. In 1973, Curtis Mayfield released his song "Future Shock," which Herbie Hancock covered as a title track in 1983—a jazz-funk-electronic fusion that was considered futuristic for its time. For Mayfield, future shock entailed a world of poverty, drug addiction, hunger, and desperation:

"When won't we understand
This is our last and only chance
Everybody, it's a future shock"

His words evoke a "presentism time orientation,"—the darker side of "the future is now." This represents how oppressed people today, particularly the descendants of enslaved Africans, embody temporal tensions, a disunity between cultural notions of time.[3]

Today this temporal orientation is connected to class, poverty, oppression, racism, and the legacy of slavery. Maintaining presentism over futurism has been both a defense against Black communal trauma under conditions of class warfare and racial oppression deriving from slavery as well as a harkening back to a more natural, ancestral temporal-spatial consciousness. Michelle M. Wright cautions that, "if we use the linear progress narrative to connect the African continent to Middle Passage Blacks today, we run into a logical problem, because our timeline moves through geography chronologically, with enslavement taking place at the beginning, or the past, and the march toward freedom moving through the ages toward the far right end of the line or arrow, which also represents the present" (2015, 57).

In a similar vein, Jeremy Rifkin explains that use of the linear progress narrative among oppressed peoples keeps them "confined in a narrow temporal band, unable to anticipate and plan for their own future. . . powerless to affect their political fate." For those deprived of access to the future, they become stuck planning for the present while the society around them speeds forward in illusory, linear progress. The future thus becomes "untrustworthy [and] unpredictable" (1989, 192).

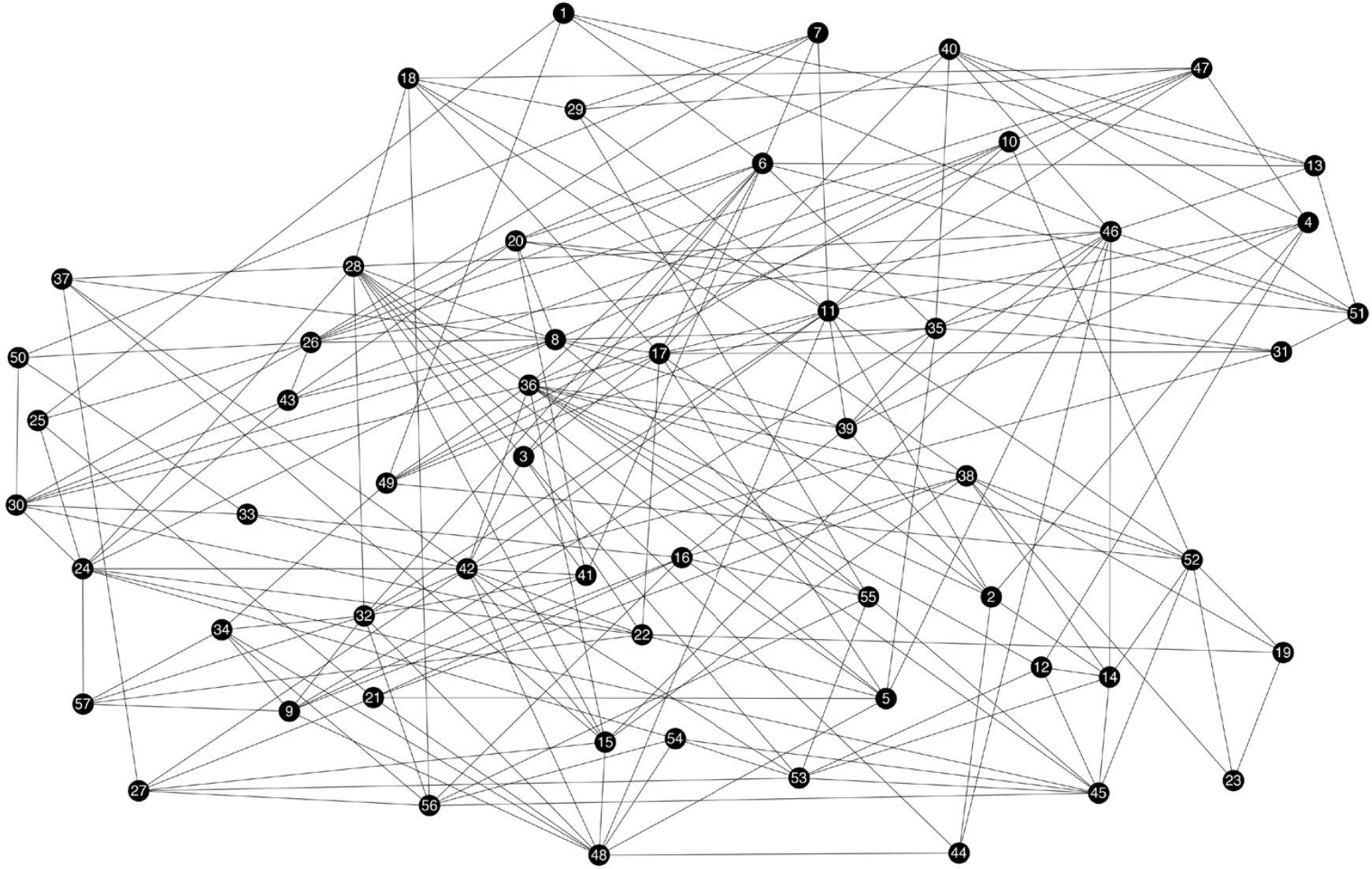
[3] Usage of the "presentism time orientation" is class and race-based. It has been recently appropriated by New Age philosophy (being "present" in meditation); however, when presentism is applied to Black people, it is often cited negatively. In this view, Black people are seen as lacking a sense of future and thus concerned solely with present pleasures and immediate concerns. In studies on increased presence of heart disease in African Americans, for example, "presentism time orientation" is often cited as one of the causal factors. African Americans with a present-time orientation "may not see the need to take preventative medication or to finish antibiotics when symptoms disappear," or "may delay seeing a physician until symptoms are severe, and begin interfering with their work or life" (Cunneen n.d.).

This narrow temporal band is used to penalize people; being ten minutes late to court, for example, can mean losing your job, kids, home, and freedom. Hierarchies of time and lack of access to the future inform intergenerational poverty in the same way that wealth passes between generations in traditionally privileged families. In a famous speech given at the Founding Rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity in 1964, Malcolm X attempted to address this imbalance by underscoring how "education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today."

For his part, Toffler identified change as "the process by which the future invades our lives" (1970, 3). Relying on a similar conception, Barack Obama structured his entire 2008 presidential campaign around "change," using it as a slogan to appropriate a specific vision of America's future. In 2009, he boldly told a joint session of Congress that, "we did not come to fear the future. We came here to shape it." In a 2011 interview, Obama was asked, "If hope and change defined the 2008 campaign, what words are going to define 2012?" In response, he said "what'll define 2012 is our vision for the future." His 2012 campaign slogan, "Forward," appropriates the same visionary, future temporality.

How do we begin to map our return to our own futures? One way that contemporary radicals can more affirmatively claim or create the future is by actively engaging temporalities and adopting alternative temporal orientations and frameworks. This, in turn, helps to shift the meaning or placement of the future and shifts the means of accessing it. As Rifkin notes, "the new time rebels advocate a radically different approach to temporality" (1989, 12). In this spirit, the concept and community of "Afrofuturism" has emerged over the last twenty years as a tool, medium, and lens with which marginalized Black communities across the diaspora might evaluate and shape our futures. According to Ingrid LaFleur, Afrofuturism is "a way of imagining possible futures through a black cultural lens" (quoted in Womack 2013, 9).

For D. Denenge Akpem, it is "an exploration and methodology of liberation, simultaneously both a location and a journey" (2011). Along with Afrofuturism, a number of other alternative movements have emerged over the past few years (e.g., Chicano futurism, Queer futurism, and Crip futurity) to appropriate or redefine notions of "future" while actively exploring what the future might look like for marginalized people. For its part, Afrofuturism lends itself well to exploring pathways to liberation, unearthing our true histories, mapping our futures, and understanding our present conditions in the flow of time. Because it provides a perpetual bridge between the past, present, and future, Afrofuturism and the Black speculative imagination can be used as liberation technologies to build future worlds.



1. Accessible
2. Accountability
3. Agency
4. Allies
5. Authority
6. Bodies
7. Care
8. Class
9. Colonialism
10. Commons
11. Community
12. Conspiracy
13. Crip
14. Demand
15. Democracy
16. Domination
17. Experience
18. Friend
19. Future
20. Gender
21. Hegemony
22. History
23. Hope
24. Ideology
25. Intellectual
26. Labor
27. Leadership
28. Liberal
29. Love
30. Materialism
31. Misogyny
32. Nation
33. Nature
34. Occupation
35. Oppression
36. Politics
37. Populism
38. Prefiguration
39. Privilege
40. Queer
41. Race
42. Representation
43. Reproduction
44. Responsibility
45. Revolution
46. Rights
47. Solidarity
48. Sovereignty
49. Space
50. Sustainable
51. Trans*/-
52. Utopia
53. Vanguard
54. Victory
55. Violence
56. War
57. Zionism

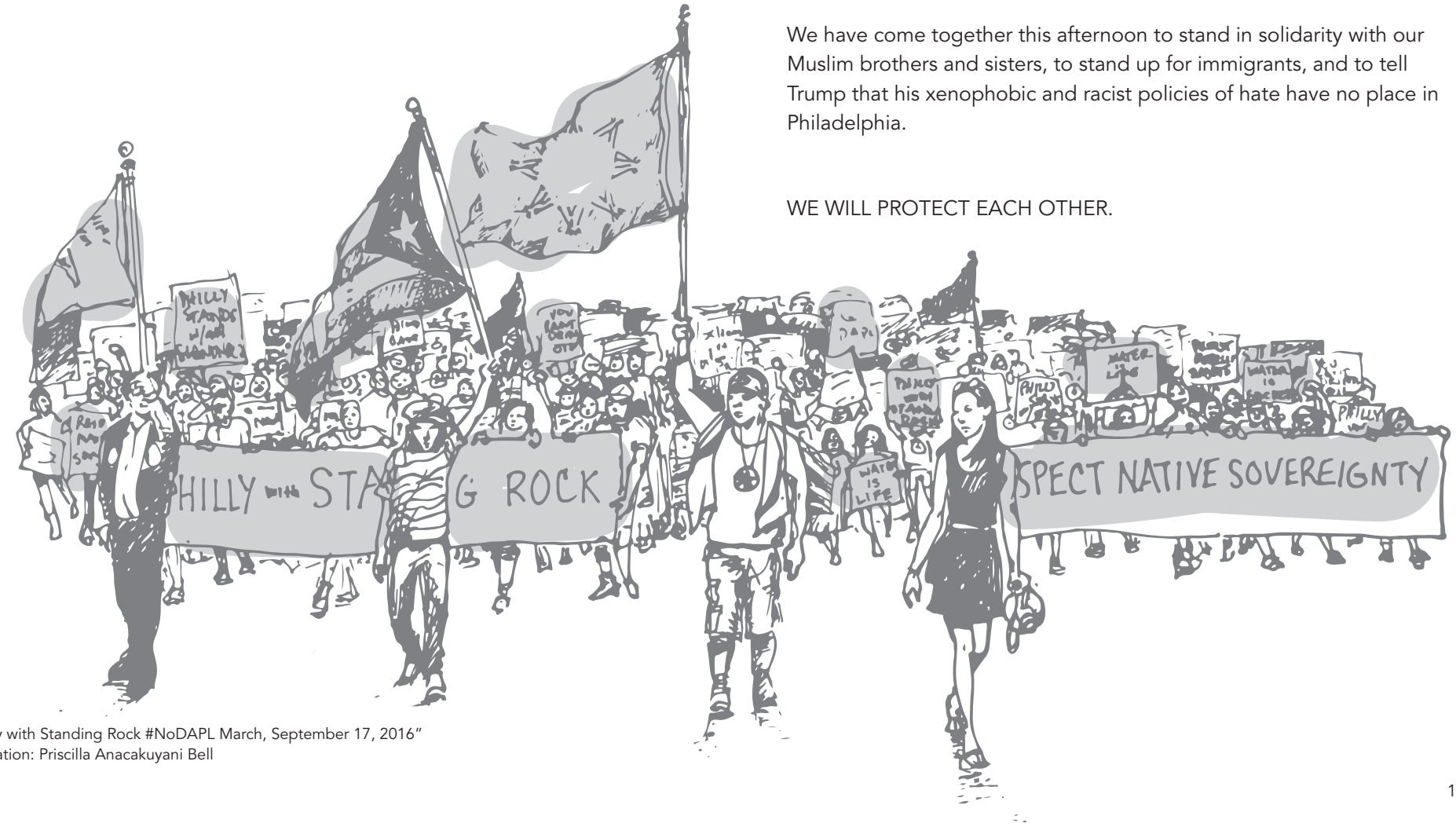
Transcript of Speech for the Philadelphia March for Humanity, February 24th, 2017

Dr. Elizabeth Ellis (Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma)

Good afternoon, friends. I am here as a representative of the Philly NoDAPL solidarity group.

We have come together this afternoon to stand in solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters, to stand up for immigrants, and to tell Trump that his xenophobic and racist policies of hate have no place in Philadelphia.

WE WILL PROTECT EACH OTHER.



"Philly with Standing Rock #NoDAPL March, September 17, 2016"
Illustration: Priscilla Anacakuyani Bell

Friends, as a Native American woman, I am deeply troubled by so many of these conversations about immigration and who gets to belong in this land.

We gather this afternoon on the stolen ancestral land of the Lenape peoples.

And we must be careful when we say, "We are all immigrants here", that we do not erase the experiences of the hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans who were violently dragged to this continent. And that we do not erase the rightful claims and the very existence of Native people whose land we now occupy, and whose territory we have carved with national walls and borders.

Instead, we must stand together against state violence that attempts to eradicate the existing rights of Native peoples to their homelands, and against the myth that this place has always belonged to only a select group of US citizens.

We must reject the white nationalist impulse that says this land is only for people of European descent.

It is NOT exclusively their land to claim, and it never has been.

I am heartened by the calls from Native peoples to offer refugees sanctuary within our territories and by Indian nations like the Tohono O'odham, whose lands extend from Sonora Mexico to Northern Arizona, and who have declared that only over their people's dead bodies will Trump be able to build his wall through their territory along the Mexican border.

I am delighted to see the hashtag #NoBanOnStolenLand trending, which emphasizes the illegitimacy of this ban.

As we move into this new era, now more than ever, we must recognize that our struggles against the settler colonial state are intertwined, and WE MUST WORK TOGETHER TO CREATE AN AMERICA THAT IS WELCOMING TO PEOPLE OF ALL RACES, RELIGIONS, ETHNICITIES, NATIONAL ORIGINS, GENDER EXPRESSIONS AND IDENTITIES, SEXUALITIES, AND ABILITIES.

So I am asking that you stand up for the rights of immigrants, of refugees, of documented and undocumented Americans, and that you stand up for the rights of Native peoples who are also fighting for their right to live in safety and peace on their own territories.

As we speak, in North Dakota hundreds of activists are standing in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux to prevent Energy Transfer Partners and the federal government from constructing the environmentally disastrous Dakota Access Pipeline across Standing Rock Sioux treaty lands. This pipeline threatens not only the health of their community and the drinking water of 18 million Americans who depend on the Missouri River, but it also violates the sovereignty of the Sioux Nation and their rights to control their territory.

So please, STAND WITH US, STAND WITH STANDING ROCK, STAND WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS, AND STAND UP FOR OUR CITY.

Call your representatives and tell them, "No ban! No wall! No pipelines!"

And then call them again.

Let the government and let the world know, that IN PHILLY, WE STAND TOGETHER.

Thank you.

#SanctuaryEverywhere #NoBanOnStolenLand #PhillyLove

"Stop Your Fears! Believe Strongly in Yourself."

Ron Whyte

Originally published as a letter to the editor of the Navajo Times, February 5, 2015.

The first thing I must acknowledge is that, though I will do my best, my words could never do Ida Mae Clinton or her struggle, justice. There is no way to adequately describe her strength, her resolve, or the depth of the spiritual relationship she had with the land that sustained not only her, but countless generations before her. Ida was what in a sane world would be considered a "national treasure," yet her passing and the passing of others like her have taken place with barely a whisper, barely a mention.

First and foremost, Ida was an activist fighting to save her way of life from the forces of colonialism. During the 1980s Ida and other elders on Black Mesa took their activism to another level and opened up their homes to "supporters" who came from all over the world to see first hand what was happening.

Supporters began staying for weeks or months at a time herding sheep and providing elder care and domestic assistance. One important task of the supporter is

to spread the word about what is happening in that area. The message of Ida's resistance must be heard. Her message, her truth, is exactly what we need to hear. In today's world of multiple and overlapping crises, many of them stemming from our warped or totally nonexistent relationship with the land we live on and the natural forces that sustain us.

Ida Mae Clinton was one of the last of a generation that truly knew what it was to be free. Their worldview is almost incomprehensible to us. How many of us can go down to our local river or stream and drink from it? How many of us can feed, clothe, and house ourselves without the aid of money or huge corporations?

Imagine learning everything you need for life without expensive universities and tedious hours of absorbing and regurgitating useless facts and information. Imagine a way of life that does not pollute and destroy the earth we depend on for survival. Though the modern world has given us much, the price has been steep and something has been lost, something fundamental to our humanity and to our ability to be good stewards of this precious earth.

In the 1960s and 70s, the Baby Boomer generation was coming of age and driving the expansion of cities and suburbs in the increasingly energy-hungry southwest. Amazingly, at that time and despite all the assaults against indigenous people over the centuries, many traditional Diné still thrived on the so-called reservation. Around this time is when the U.S. government instigated land dispute between the Navajo and Hopi tribes began in earnest.

It was no coincidence that the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act came into effect during this period of settler expansion in the southwest. This legislation that officially disenfranchised many thousands of traditional Diné was enacted in 1974. The Navajo Generating Station power plant was officially brought online two years later in 1976; it ran on coal that was strip mined from lands that had until a few years before been occupied by traditional Diné and Hopi living together in relative peace and harmony. Essentially, there was cultural genocide in exchange for cheap, dirty energy.

Ida lived far enough from the mine and the Navajo Generating Station to avoid the very worst aspects of this turmoil (devastating pollution and a marring of the landscape), but she was still swept up in the tragic events due to living on the wrong side of the newly created Hopi partition boundary. In the very beginning she could have taken a settlement and moved to relocation housing like many others were compelled to do, but she did not. As the years wore on, and as she grew frailer, rather than take the easier path of moving in with relatives to live out the rest of her days in relative comfort, Ida chose to continue residing on her land despite the hardships she knew she would face.

Her own tribal leaders, many of them brainwashed by the settler education system and more concerned with money and status than with anything else, turned their backs on her and the other resisters. Services like road and home repairs that were provided to most tribal members were denied to Ida because, according to the bureaucrats, technically she was no longer living on the Navajo Reservation. I remember Ida telling me several times how she and her daughter Rose (who was special needs and required a lot of care) would often resort to eating potatoes for days on end. There were times when she would be fearful of people trespassing on her land, yet there was no phone line, no electricity. Living as a resister to relocation also caused rifts between Ida and members of her family who had made different choices. There was bitterness on both sides; some relationships fell apart and were never mended.

Knowing the physical and emotional hardships she would face, why did Ida choose to stay? Well, when the land dispute kicked into high gear, she recognized right away that the future of the Diné people was in jeopardy. She understood instinctively that dislocation from the land would mean a loss of tradition, a loss of language, and that the loss of these things constituted a form of violence. This is why she advocated for direct action. When the livestock impoundments began, Ida fought back. Along with her friends and family in Star Mountain valley she confronted BIA officials, even going as far as to get into physical altercations with them. She marched, she protested, she traveled to faraway cities to spread awareness about the threats facing her traditional way of life.

Here are some of her words from the last video recorded interview she gave to NaBahe Katenay Keedihiihii for Big Mountain Productions: "Our livelihood, like the sheep, all of it they confiscated! The sheep are our savings and income, food as well. There are the cornfields, the sweat lodges, places of holiness — all of these they destroyed in our area. To me it is unacceptable! Another solution with more force perhaps; stronger plans initiated from here; our supporters and non-Native allies notified — Access into [the] coal mine pit needs to be blocked, a barrier set up and their operations halted."

During the last weeks of Ida's life the Hopi and BIA assault on Black Mesa elders was renewed with the tacit support of the Navajo tribal government. Swat teams complete with helicopters descended on Black Mesa after a lull of over a decade, terrorizing and arresting people and confiscating livestock. Though Ida was recovering in a nursing home far from her own land at the time, and though her family did not dare let her know what was happening, it was almost as if she could somehow sense what was going on. The small progress she had managed to make began to reverse itself. She became "agitated" according to the nurses, and began insisting on being allowed to go home immediately.

I wish I could say that Ida passed peacefully from this world after her decades of inspirational struggle, but that would be a lie. Thanks to a fundamentally broken geriatric care system, her last months on this earth were very difficult. The details are too painful to recount here. In the end, her heart that was so strong and warm and full of love failed. Because of the situation on Black Mesa she could not be buried on her beautiful ancestral lands, but instead was laid to rest in some strip mall border town. Sadly, the circumstances of her passing are not unique and will be familiar to many reading this.

What is unique is the way she lived. She lived life on her own terms. She fought for what she believed in, drawing upon wells of strength that must have been quite deep. In the days following her passing, many family members came out to her land over a period of several days to pay their respects, as is their custom. Seeing Ida's great-grandchildren and other young relatives taking the sheep out to pasture made me smile in spite of my grief. She had left them an important gift; she had been a living example, a living testament to the importance of holding onto their traditions. Her sacrifice was not in vain.

Over these past few months I think I've cried more for her than I cried for my own grandmother when she passed in 2010 (rest in peace). This was surprising at first, but then understanding dawned on me. Yes, Ida was not related to me by blood; she was not flesh of my flesh. Yet flesh can be corrupted, destroyed, and obliterated. Flesh rots away and blood can be tainted. Spiritual bonds and emotional ties born of shared experiences, mutual respect, and an acknowledgement of another person's humanity and uniqueness—these bonds are not so easily broken. Some might say that these bonds transcend our earthbound existence; they are, or can be, immortal.

I will end this with Ida's own words: "The aggressors force requires prayers to confront them, Stop your fears! Believe strongly in yourself!"

Gardenpunk Blues, an excerpt

Marlon MacAllister

The streetlight outside the bodega flickered, reflecting in glints in puddles of water. A shard of silicon paneling sat atop the light like a corona above a flame. Wet purple paulownia flowers littered the street, fringed with grassy weeds against the crumbling sidewalks. Paulownias, or princess trees as they were called in the city, had busted through the abandoned buildings to either side of the bodega, spreading their broad leaves through window frames and holes in rooftops. The smells of decaying asphalt and sweet blossoms mingled in the air.

"Thanks for agreeing to meet on such short notice," Iona said. She leaned against the corner store as Ricky approached, tossing and catching her digging knife, the moon and flickering streetlight casting shadows over her dark skin.

"Always willing to take a job from a good client," Ricky said.

"What's the grab?"

"Rubber hoses," Iona said.

"Rubber hoses," he repeated, scratching his shaved brown head and digging a finger in his hairy ear.

"There's a new garden a few blocks from here where a bunch of suburb folks are settling, escaping the Meld expansion. I don't have time to manage it, and they don't really know what they're doing, so I gotta help them set up a drip line or else it'll be ruined … and then they'll start doing business with gangs for food and next thing you know people are getting harassed for made-up debts in our streets. Or they'll give up because it gets too hard and slip into the Meld."

Ricky nodded.

"This rain was a blessing," she continued, "but it's gonna be a hundred degrees tomorrow.

Elders are saying this is the last rain for a while. Hot and dry all week."

"So when do you need the hoses?"

"Tomorrow," Iona said. Ricky shook his head in protest.

"Go to Sabrina for that Walmart shit. I need at least 24 hours."

"Sabrina's prices are an insult to working people," Iona scoffed. "Get me two hundred feet of hose and I'll pay double your standard rate. Get me more, and I'll give you a bonus."

"25 hour-dollars," Ricky said. "Extra 5 for every extra hundred we get."

"Done," Iona said. They shook hands, she turned to go, then turned back. "Yo. Everyone says we have no future. That's why they slip away. Every day, we gotta prove them wrong."

They looked together toward the neon-pulsing Meld skyline to the south, a forest of steel obelisks draped in solar cells, like moss gripping the sides of tree trunks. Giant liquid crystal screens displayed visions of sex and pastoral scenery against the charcoal-orange sky.

Psychedelic pink haze rose between the buildings in that drugged-mindless downtown fuck-wonderland.

Ricky stepped inside the bodega after she left. He missed potato chips, the extra-oily ones that cost two bucks. He missed strolling into the corner store at midnight, drinking a 40 and smoking a joint with his buddies.

"Yo, chino," he called to the guy behind the counter. "Got any chips?"

"Chips? We ain't had chips in like five years, boricua," he drawled. "And man, you got to take that anti-racism class with the kids. Don't call me chino. My family was from Burma."

"Just fuckin with you," Ricky drawled back. He grabbed a leaf of sticky grain and greens from the shelf and plunked two quarters on the counter. "Lemme get one of these." After the Collapse, old American coins and bills were used to represent approximate time values of products. A dollar represented an hour of work, including aggregate costs. Hour-dollars.

The guy at the counter took a swig of his beer, a deep amber-purple mulberry homebrew, and deposited the quarters in a box behind the counter. He noted the transaction in a ledger made from sheets of pressed birch bark. "Need anything else?"

"Nah," Ricky said. He took a bite. The ball was room temperature but fresh, probably sorghum by its nutty aftertaste, with hints of basil, garlic and coriander.

He needed to find Vinson. Vin knew how to handle himself and had working transportation. The Meld had taken control of the pipelines as part of the worldwide clean energy transition, so his van ran on seed oil.

After walking about ten minutes around a once-tight-knit, then-industrial, then-gentrified, now-abandoned part of the neighborhood, Ricky found Vinson's dented white Sprinter. It was parked out front of Heinz Smelting and Metalworking, the local scrap forge run out of the shell of a Catholic church.

Several chimneys billowing black smoke burst like octopus tentacles from the 18th century sacred architecture. White surfaces were spattered with a layer of metallic dust. Ricky's nose wrinkled at the scent of molten lead, though he chuckled as he did every time at the hand-painted sign by the gate out front: "FUCK OFF NIMBY FUCKS. I WELCOME YOUR BUSINESS."

Three men were conferring behind the gates. Ricky identified Vinson's tall, bearded black-skinned frame and Heinz's stocky, pink-faced bulk. The other guy, a skinny, sandy-haired kid with a rifle strapped to his back, was unfamiliar to him.

"These casings are decent," Heinz said, holding some bullet casings in his sausage-like hands. "I can work with them. A hundred rounds, four hour-dollars, sounds fair?"

"Four?" Vinson scoffed. "I can see three hours on manufacturing, and that's if you're lazy, which I know you're not. Where's that other hour coming from?"

"My chemist is charging me really high premiums," Heinz said. "She's having supply issues. It's all I can do."

Vinson laughed. "That might work with some rube from the sticks, but I do business with Camila same as you, and I know you buy

in bulk. Ain't been no change in her prices."

"Hard bargainer," Heinz grimaced.

"Just looking out for hour-dollar parity, you know me," Vinson replied.

"How about three and a half, and that's as low as I can go."

"That's fair," Vinson said, switching to a sympathetic tone. "Not trying to bust your balls. I know times are tough."

They exchanged items, Heinz retreated back inside his compound, and they walked out. The kid wore a tan leather jacket and looked to be in his early twenties.

"Hey, Vin," Ricky said.

"Hey Ricky," Vinson said. "What's hangin?"

"Got us a job for tonight. Four-man crew." He explained Iona's offer. "Want in? Know anyone who'd be up on short notice?"

"This guy," Vinson said, looking at sandy-hair. "Name's Angel. Knew his mom from climate activism back before the Collapse, owed her a favor. She's with that group of people from the suburbs who came in a few weeks ago." He leaned in close to whisper, "Dad didn't make it. Mom asked me to take him under my wing." Stepping back, he continued, "Kid's a hell of a shot. He hit a squirrel from half a block away. That was our dinner last night."

"I'm up for work," Angel said.

Ricky made a face, but time was tight, and he could use a good marksman to watch their backs.

"Okay, you're in. I got one more person in mind. We're headed to Sabrina's."

"Gonna get that niece of hers?" Vinson said. They all climbed into the van. "What's her name," Vinson continued. "Janie?"

"Yup," Ricky said. The girl was a smooth operator, cool under pressure, and she knew the history of every neighborhood in the city.

Vinson started the ignition, and they drove down cracked streets. He parked in front of a large unmarked warehouse and cut the engine. Ricky and Angel got out of the van, pulled the cord hanging by the roll-up garage door, and waited. After a couple minutes, the door opened

enough for the three of them to duck in. It looked like a miniature Walmart, with several rows of shelving, white drop ceilings and linoleum-tile floor.

"Ricky?" a young woman said from the garage door controls. Her demeanor was businesslike, crisp, her straight, almost-black hair pulled back with a hemp cord. "You're lucky I was up. What do you want?"

"Got a job for you." Ricky briefed her.

"Oh, Iona! I like her," she said. "So this'll keep my aunt from getting the sale, huh?"

"Well, sure," Ricky said.

"Sold. She's been a bitch to me all week. I'll meet you outside Kai's. Let me get some stuff from my room." She lowered her voice. "By the way, who's the cutie?"

"He's our muscle. Don't talk much. Guess he's good with a gun."

"Mmm. Shoulda washed my hair." "Cute girl like you. See what happens."

"Okay, okay," Janie said. "You know I don't get out much. I'll be ready in ten. Thanks for thinking of me."

They ducked back under the garage door and walked to Kai's. Several planters with collards and trellised string beans sat by the benches outside the bar. There was an open green door and a hand-painted sign with a gray cat's face hanging over the stoop. "KAI'S BAR. CHEAP BEER. LIVE MUSIC. FUN TIMES." A few people leaned against the side wall smoking and drinking, and a woman's Romany-accented voice flowed like velvet over the horns and percussion coming from within. Ricky rolled a joint and took a puff.

"Too old to be hustling every goddamn night," he muttered to himself.

After a long silence, Ricky said, "What's your deal, kid? Why you here?"

"I just moved here from the suburbs?" Angel had a pronounced uptalk. "With my mom? The Meld was coming and we needed to leave."

"Where you learn to shoot?"

"I've always been good at it? Hunting, you know, that sort of thing?"

"You gonna listen to anything I say, no matter what?"

"Um, I guess?"

Something about him didn't sit right with Ricky. Trying to get the kid to say something real, he asked, "What happened to your dad?"

Angel stared at the ground. Then in a quiet, firm voice, Angel said, "He couldn't see the point in the struggle, so he left. It's been hard. Please drop it?

Ricky decided to let it go. At least the kid had some backbone. They listened to the melancholy crooning drifting from the bar. The music's sad romance touched Ricky's heart, making him think about his ex. She had walked with a perpetual limp, but when she hit the dance floor it was like she was a different person:

graceful, confident and strong. After the Collapse, sick of his constant hustle, she'd chosen the Meld and its guaranteed, mindless satisfaction instead.

A few minutes later, Janie came down the street with her canvas shoulder bag, and the three of them piled into the back of the van.

Vinson keyed the ignition, and they started to go.

Toward a Climate-Stabilizing Agricultural System

Nathan Kleinman

Late summer view from EFN's flagship farm in Elmer, NJ; organic hay-field in foreground, GMO-soy in background.

Late summer view from EFN's flagship farm in Elmer, NJ; organic hay-field in foreground, GMO-soy in background.

Climate change is the most profound crisis facing humanity today, even in a world of crises (war, racism, poverty, hunger, inequality, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, environmental degradation, and mass extinction, to name a few). Our rapidly changing weather and rising global temperatures portend a time in the not-too-distant future when crops fail across the world and our species begins to starve, beginning of course with people already living on the edge. This is not some idle fantasy, but the consensus opinion of climate scientists and agronomists alike.

Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is one of the primary drivers of global climate change. As humans burn more and more fossil fuels, we pump more and more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, but burning is not the only source of atmospheric carbon dioxide: according to some estimates, agriculture and forestry add roughly the same amount of carbon to the atmosphere each year as energy production and transportation

Every time a field is plowed, it releases carbon into the atmosphere, and so too every time a factory churns out fertilizers or pesticides. However, agriculture need not always be a driver of climate change. In fact, agriculture could actually help to reverse climate change (more safely than any other method) and the method is simple: use farming to sequester carbon in the soil rather than releasing it into the atmosphere.

Even if we cut carbon emissions to zero tomorrow, we would still face devastating warming due to the carbon already in the atmosphere (not to mention methane and other greenhouse gases). If we make this vision a reality—which will require nothing less than a sea change in farming across the United States and around the world—we will be able to remove enough carbon from the atmosphere to save our planet from the harrowing future promised by climate change.

If we put our collective minds to it, we can achieve the lofty goal of a climate-stabilizing agricultural system. Five critical efforts already underway are helping to get us there, and the Experimental Farm Network is designed to support each effort:

1 **The modern organic farming movement, now over a century in age.**

2 **The agro-ecology movement, including its latest incarnation, permaculture.**

3 **The seed sovereignty movement.**

4 **The increasing diversity of US farmers.**

5 **The breeding and improvement of perennial crops.**

Organic Farming Movement

'Madawaska' Tartary Buckwheat (Fagopyrum tataricum), an old Acadian heirloom from Lille, Maine, growing at the EFN flagship farm in Elmer, NJ; this underutilized pseudo-cereal has uses as food, medicine, and cover crop.

According to Rodale Institute, the authority on organic agriculture since the middle of the twentieth century, we already have the tools to use agriculture to "capture all of our current annual global greenhouse gas emissions and more, drawing down excess carbon from the atmosphere every year."

Five main practices give organic farming the power to improve environmental health and help create a climate-stabilizing agricultural system:

1 **No chemicals**
Organic farming prohibits artificial fertilizer and banned chemicals that harm the environment and are energy intensive to produce.

2 **Compost**
The production and proper use of compost as natural fertilizer is a critical component of organic farming, improving soil and preventing release of greenhouse gases through waste decomposing in landfills.

3 **Crop rotation**
Rotating crops reduces the need to apply fertilizers, discourages pests and weeds, and improves the soil ecosystem as a habitat for carbon-storing microorganisms.

4 **Cover crops**
Planting cover crops—like clover, buckwheat and rye– improves soil health while also reducing topsoil runoff, photo synthesizing carbon dioxide into oxygen on otherwise bare land, and providing natural fertilizer as green manure.

5 **Reduces tillage**
Switching to no-till or low-till practices cuts on-farm energy use, reduces runoff, and improves soil health by encouraging the proliferation of beneficial microorganisms, all of which results in more carbon in the soil.

Rodale and many others have long tried to convert farmers to organic, but much work remains to be done. Recent consumer preferences have made organic agriculture the fastest growing segment of the industry. Yet only 0.6 percent of US farmland is certified organic at this point. The growth may be fast, but it's not fast enough. Many farmers remain turned off by what constitutes "organic", believing government requirements are either too loose or too stringent, or that it's too challenging to implement, or that participation in the USDA Organic program might open up their farming practices to too much scrutiny.

We believe organically produced food is healthier and that organic agriculture is much better for the environment and the climate. Unfortunately, universal adoption of organic principles seems quite unlikely to take place anytime soon, so if we want to develop the climate-stabilizing farming we need, other approaches will be necessary.

Agroecology, Permaculture, and Regenerative Agriculture

Allegheny Chinquapins (Castanea pumila) photographed in the wild by EFN Co-Founder Nate Kleinman.

These terms generally apply to the same sorts of practice: developing a productive managed ecosystem through the use of perennial plants working in harmony with natural processes. Agroecology has been called "forest gardening," because it can be done in existing forests or through the creation of new forests.

Agroecological systems mimic natural systems and thus have all the benefits of actual forests: they convert carbon dioxide into oxygen and sequester it in their roots; they need few external inputs; and though they take a long time to establish, they ultimately require less work. Unfortunately, until they are quite mature, they are typically not as productive as

conventional farms. More work needs to be done to improve these systems and convince farmers that agroecology presents a secure way to feed their families

Lots of exciting work in this arena being done by organizations like the Savanna Institute in Illinois, which "explores the potential of savanna-based systems to become ecologically sound, agriculturally productive, and economically viable alternatives to the corn-soybean rotation that currently dominates agriculture in the Midwestern United States," and Badgersett Research Corporation in Minnesota, which has been breeding nut trees (hazelnuts, chestnuts, and hickory-pecans) for use as staple crops since 1978, providing the vision of replacing corn and soy with perennial nut crops.

However, as important as this modern research may prove, we should take our greatest inspiration in practice from indigenous peoples throughout the world who have been agroecologists for thousands of years. Recent studies have revealed that large swaths of the Amazon rainforest—considered one of the last wild places in the world—were and in many cases remain managed landscapes. Favorite plants, even the tallest trees, are planted nearest to communities.

Here in the Delaware Valley, the Lenape people grew common annual crops like corn, beans, and squash, but also planted and likely selected relatively rare perennial crops including pawpaws (Asimina triloba), mayapples (Podophyllum peltatum), maypop passionflower (Passiflora incarnata), persimmons (Diospyros virginiana), hickory nuts (various Carya species), American chestnuts (Castanea dentata), and Chinquapin chestnuts (Castanea pumila), as they developed and maintained productive landscapes for use through the generations. They had a long-term vision and wisdom that makes today's "civilized" people seem childishly naive in comparison.

Unfortunately, with billions of people living in cities, land distribution starkly unequal, and more work to be done to maximize production in agroecological systems (especially in temperate regions like ours), these movements are still a long way from solving the climate crisis.

Seed Sovereignty

'Armenian Asparagus' beans (Phaseolus vulgaris), a productive, pest-resistent Romano-type bush bean from Armenia, grown at the EFN flagship farm in 2014.

Seeds form the bedrock of agriculture. They not only hold genetic data, but also cultural knowledge, human stories, our ancestors' hopes and dreams. We could not live without seeds. And without protecting and defending our basic right to seeds, we can never guarantee our future as a species.

Seed sovereignty requires preserving biodiversity of crop plants and their wild relatives, defending the use of traditional seeds against multinational corporations' patent lawyers, and protecting these vital resources from contamination by genetically modified organisms (or GMO) crops. Once GMO pollen reaches our traditional farms and gardens—carried by insects or wind—it irreversibly transfers laboratory-generated genetic codes, often taken from other species, into our food supply, corrupting the crops upon which billions depend for survival.

Important work toward seed sovereignty is being done every day by organizations great and small, from countless local seed libraries from Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, to Omaha, Nebraska—each under threat from overzealous government officials enforcing antiquated seed laws—to Dr. Vandana Shiva's world-transforming Navdanya organization in India and the allied Global Movement for Seed Freedom. Everyone who saves seeds is a participant in the struggle for seed sovereignty—but unfortunately the enemies of the movement (Monsanto, Bayer, Syngenta, Dow, Cargill, etc.) are powerful and unrelenting

Seed sovereignty means self-sufficiency. It means the newest generation has all the tools to carry on the legacy of previous generations, both at societal and familial levels. It means preserving ecosystems where crop wild relatives live, and maintaining historic crop varieties for possible

future use, not only in seed banks, but also in the field. Most importantly, it means maintaining the power to control our own destiny, rather than ceding our autonomy to corporations and the corporate state. Without seed sovereignty, all is lost.

Increased Diversity of Farmers

From 2007 to 2012, the number of non-white farmers in the US increased by 15 percent. This is a hopeful development, not least because we need as many farmers as possible right now. It is especially hopeful given the struggles of non-white farmers during the twentieth century, many of which continue today.

In 1910, African American farmers owned 15.6 million acres of agricultural land. By 1982, they owned just 3.1 million acres. It was not a natural decline. Government agents used to tear up loan applications from African American farmers—a fact underscored in 2010 by the $1.25 billion settlement won by hundreds of African American farmers who filed suit against the USDA for discrimination in 1997.

Countless non-white farmers have been forced off their land because of their race, whether from their inability to get a loan, or being discriminated against by potential buyers of their produce, or by direct violence or intimidation from neighbors.

The recent increase in farmers of all races (other than white) is a sign that the situation may finally be improving. But there is still a long way to go: five white landowners—that's five individual people—own more rural land than all black landowners combined.

Race is an issue across farming, and the organic and sustainable farming movements described above are not immune. It is no secret that most of the organized manifestations of sustainable farming movements—organic farming symposiums, permaculture convergences, etc.—tend to be very white spaces. Countless opportunities flow from these events, including education, land tenure, equipment, networking, and seeds, so anyone not present loses out. Much work remains to be done in these movements to create safe and accessible spaces for farmers of color, as well as LGBTQ farmers, farmers with disabilities, women farmers, immigrant farmers, refugee farmers, and others.

Until there is equality of access to land, education, markets, and financing, our agricultural system will not achieve its full potential because so many would-be farmers are unable to achieve theirs.

New Perennial Staple Crops

Purple Tree Collards (Brassica spp.), a frost-tender perennial cabbage popular among gardeners in California, which likely originated in Europe.

Perennial crops regrow year after year. They reduce or eliminate the need for tillage, require far less water than annual crops, and stand up better to pests. Most importantly, by their very nature they sequester carbon in their roots and in the soil, with the aid of microorganisms that thrive in the undisturbed ecosystem created by the plants themselves.

In just our fourth year, EFN researchers are already involved in exciting work with various perennial crops, including the relatively common, like asparagus (Asparagus officinale), sunchoke (Helianthus tuberosum), seakale (Crambe maritima), skirret (Sium sisarum), lovage (Levisticum officinale), and leeks (Allium ampeloprasum), along with plenty that are quite uncommon, like Tartarian bread-plant (Crambe tataria), perennial sorghum (Sorghum bicolor), the Andean tuber known as "oca" (Oxalis tuberosa), native American groundnuts (Apios americana), mayapples (Podophyllum peltatum), Chinquapin chestnuts (Castanea pumila), Illinois bundleflowers (Desmanthus illinoiensis), perennial corn relatives known as "teosinte" (Zea perennis and Zea diploperennis), and various perennial legumes from around the world (including alfalfa, hog peanuts, Lathyrus, and Lotus, among others). At our flagship farm in Elmer, NJ, we've even tried our hand at perennial wheat and perennial wheat relatives (like intermediate wheatgrass, or Thinopyrum intermedium), with some success. Perennial rye will be started this year.

For over a century, the development of perennial grains has been a dream of many an ambitious plant breeder. Perennial wheat,

in particular, has been something of a Holy Grail, and makes a perfect case study.

Beyond all the dreaming, a great deal of progress has actually been made toward perennial wheat. In the early days of the twentieth century, US researchers were con-vinced by the first hybrids between wheat and perennial wild relatives that the effort was worth undertaking. After flourishing for a couple decades, efforts in the US flagged with the onset of the Great Depression.

During the 1940s and '50s, the Soviet Union became a center for research into perennial grains, but Stalin's totalitarianism and the Cold War put an end to their program. Around the same time, breeders in the US, led by Coit Suneson at UC Davis, began experimenting with perennializing wheat. Suneson got closer to the Holy Grail—commercially viable perennial wheat—than anyone ever had before him, but with his death in the early 1970s, the end of the UC Davis program, and the subsequent loss of many of his seeds, the effort was set back by decades.

A few universities (including Washington State University and Michigan State University) and small seed companies (notably Tim Peters' now-defunct Peters Seed and Research) have made important discoveries and built on the work of the programs that preceded them, but funding is always a struggle and it is inher-ently challenging to maintain the decades-long commitment re-quired for such a complex project as perennializing wheat.

In 1976, Wes and Dana Jackson founded the non-profit Land Institute in Salina, Kansas. The Jacksons aimed to develop an agricultural system based on the Kansas prairie, with perennial grains at its core. As its name in-dicates, the Land Institute's focus has always been on conserving land and soil. Over the past forty years, the Institute has worked to breed perennial wheat, sorghum, sunflowers, and more. They've worked via interspecies hybridiza-tion and by domesticating pe-rennial wild crop relatives, which is how they developed perhaps their most promising crop to date, a wheatgrass with greatly enlarged seeds known as "Kernza."

In the words of Wes Jackson, who still guides the organization as president, "If your life's work can be accomplished in your lifetime, you're not thinking big enough." (We could not agree more.) Prog-ress has indeed been slow, but the Land Institute's work has been the most consistent and exciting yet toward the goal of perennial grains and oilseeds. But like the few university-based programs working on perennial staple crops, lack of adequate funding has been and remains a major roadblock (so too, unfortunately, has the Land Institute's unwilling-ness to spread their material far and wide—though that is chang-ing now, at least with the early nationwide trials of Kernza).

Perennial staple crops have the greatest power to shift our agricultural system from one that drives climate change to one that stops or reverses it. As a species, we must double-down on their development by supporting those who have been doing the work for decades and encouraging far more researchers, farmers, and volunteers to dive into the field. That is the dream behind the Experimental Farm Network. For more information on the pos-sibilities of developing perennial grains and oilseeds, see Prospects for Developing Perennial Grain Crops, Paying for Perennialism: A Quest for Food and Fund-ing, and Evaluating Perennial Candidates for Domestication: Lessons from Wild Sunflower Relatives.

A Critical Role for EFN

Seeds drying at the Roughwood greenhouse of EFN Board member Dr. William Woys Weaver in Devon, PA (emmer wheat hanging, sorghum on the table, seed-cleaning machine built by EFN Board member Owen Taylor in the foreground).

EFN is building an open source online platform to facilitate col-laboration on plant breeding and sustainable agriculture research. We believe our decentralized, open-source, network-based approach represents the best way to accelerate innovation in agricultural research, especially toward the development of new perennial crops. The threat of global climate change demands an unprecedented global effort to revolutionize agriculture, and we must move with urgency to make the kinds of advancements nec-essary in time to save the planet.

A climate-stabilizing agricultural system is within our reach, but we must act now.

There is good news: plant breeders and researchers, whether they be amateurs or professionals, are in a better position to innovate than ever before, largely due to computers and the internet. Over a hundred years of seed collections by USDA "agricultural explorers" are now available at the click of a button to anyone with "a legitimate research, educational, or breeding purpose" thanks to the Agricultural Research Service's Germplasm Resources Information Network (known as ARS-GRIN) and the robust USDA system of research stations across the United States (who do perhaps best work of anyone in the US government). Thanks to online search engines, an immensity of published research and scholarly articles can be found and read for free online (though still too much of it remains hidden behind paywalls). Social networking has begun to form communities of all the quixotic plant breeders out there who until now have too often toiled alone in obscurity.

If Coit Suneson had been on Facebook, you can bet his perennial wheat strains would never have disappeared.

A beautiful 'Tracy' Mayapple (Podophyllum peltatum) ripens on the forest-floor in EFN's forest garden in Elmer, NJ. This unique cultivar yields far more delicious fruit than most wild varieties of the species, a native perennial that also contains the powerful chemotherapy drug podophyllin.

The Experimental Farm Network is being built to provide an online home for the plant breeders who need reinforcements and the volunteers who want to help them. No more research should be halted or slowed due to lack of time, space, or labor. No important breeding program should come to end simply because the lone person who started it can no longer continue it.

The work of revolutionizing agriculture is generational in scope. Our goals may not be achieved in a few years, or even a few decades, but the work must be done, and it must start now. Nothing less than the future of humanity depends on it.

A Final Thought

A wise old person once told their grown child: "Be sure to plant those pear trees tomorrow."

The child replied: "You know those trees will take 100 years to bear fruit, right?"

The wise elder nodded: "Well then, you had better plant those trees today."

The Futures Atmosphere

Mission

The Futures atmosphere is thinking collectively about how to embody and present multiple visions for the future. Within this context, collaborators have been asking, "How are we reclaiming the past and decolonizing the future?" This atmosphere draws from anti-colonial and neo-colonial work to propose, model, and amplify multiple futures in Philadelphia, across time and space.

How We Formed

We began meeting as a working group in February 2016, and within four meetings, we shared our stories, passions, and visions for our futures. It soon became clear that we are a diverse group of individuals. Many communities, many pasts, emerge many visions, many futures. This awareness culminated in a group activity that included building a sculpture from our collective bodies, together a physical representation of how we all must be involved and leading us to the phrase that guides our collective work, "DECOLONIZING OUR FUTURES / RECLAIMING OUR PAST."

Decolonization means deconstructing the colonial hegemony of the dominant culture and allowing an ecosystem of cultural expressions to be heard. From July to December we came to the conclusion that because we are made of many futures, we want to have a flexible container within which to hold them. The future doesn't exist in any one place—it is in the empowered hearts and minds of our collaborators and the city as a whole. We decided that any site we developed had to be able to hold everyone.

The idea of the Mobile Futures Institute came together through the imagining of several collaborators. In part, this vision was influenced by the ongoing work of Rasheedah Phillips and Camae Ayewa of Black Quantum Futurism and their Community Futures Lab - a gallery, library and workshop space in Sharswood that aimed to help people tell their stories through connecting with past-future visions of time. Another collaborator, Howard Bailey,

had an idea of "mobile conversation rooms," or movable spaces of neutral ground in which people could share and imagine the future of their city. Such "rooms" are imagined as moving from block to block, empowering people's visions of the future.

A network of collaborator organizations began ideating how they wanted to participate and it became clear that a mobile vision - the "Mobile Futures Institute" - was necessary. We came up with the idea of a bus to travel routes between our different collaborator sites. This way, no one vision of the future would be elevated, but rather the network would be a place for many futures to play a part. The bus itself became an incubator and source of imagination and creativity for everyone involved and serves as a point of reference to gather stories and embody the future.

What We Value

We were trying to be conscious about radical inclusivity and recognizing bias. Part of being radically inclusive is being aware and careful of *intersectionality* - the idea that we can be privileged in some ways but not in others, and that different kinds of bias and oppression can intersect and strengthen each other. In particular, when asking how white allies can be included in the project, we came up with a participatory criteria to ground us.

We cannot work together toward multiple futures without changing the inequality on which this country was founded. It is important to take into account how systemic violence expressed through systems of settler-colonialism, racial capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and white privilege continue to exist in our everyday lives - in our workspaces, in our museums, and in our city.

In order to dream toward a future that embraces liberatory policy and practice, it was crucial to have leaders who are, or who are in solidarity with, the people of color (POC) communities who are systematically denied resources and self-determination.

Therefore, for those who are most often promoted into leadership, this was an opportunity to shift the power dynamics and learn how to stand with those who have been traditionally put into roles as targets of oppression.

In our striving to draw from the margins, we must also acknowledge who is not here.

We acknowledge that our working group could have done more work to make our language more accessible to people of all abilities; that we could have held more space for generative critiques of ableism; that we could have featured more voices of trans and gender-nonconforming people as well as Native Americans/Indigenous peoples. We suffer in that regard to live up to our radical praxis, and through our recognition, we are recommitting ourselves to continue to grow to honor the experiences and knowledges of people at the margins in order to center their lives within the creation of a more liberatory future. *Achieving this goal was, and continues to be, a learning process—an important and challenging process for everyone involved.*

Mobile Futures Institute (MFI)

We are not only realizing that we are decolonizing, redesigning, and liberating our futures in our own city, in our own ways, but we are arduously building off of anti-colonial work that seeks to reclaim our pasts, our presents, and our perceptions of times and spaces, because our futures (nuestros futuros) are already here performing, disintegrating, and reconstituting within our lives and environments.

—Mobile Futures Institute

Painting: Priscilla Anacakuyani Bell

Originating as a part of the expansive project entitled *Philadelphia Assembled* (PHLA), the Mobile Futures Institute (MFI) is a vehicle and a programmed network of locations from across the city. Initially, the vehicle serves as a meeting place, classroom, workshop, library and mobile installation; and the programmed network consists of similarly aligned organizations and individuals (many whom are already involved with PHLA and doing significant work in the city).

Painting: Priscilla Anacakuyani Bell

The MFI is a platform upon which to collectively imagine new forms of solidarity and build toward equitable and just futures. Therefore the goal of the MFI is to imagine multiple visions of the city's futures, critiquing, explaining, and envisioning responses to the call, to "Decolonizing our Futures and Reclaiming our Past". From this perspective (as indigenous people, people of color, and white allies), the MFI is reclaiming our own futurity, making counter narratives that aim to understand and dismantle the impact of settler colonialism, and openly reimagining what is possible in creative, practical, unexpected, and potentially "impossible" ways.

The MFI is also a community-building tool that strengthens partnerships with different organizations and individuals from across the city. While the scale and form of this collaboration varies, the MFI is a space to convene many collective and individual proposals and visions.

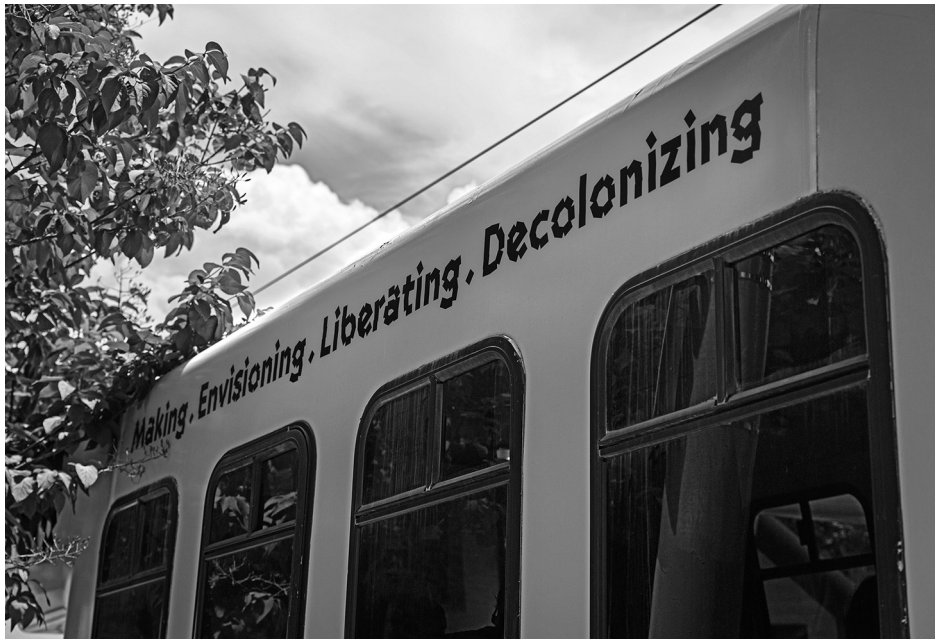
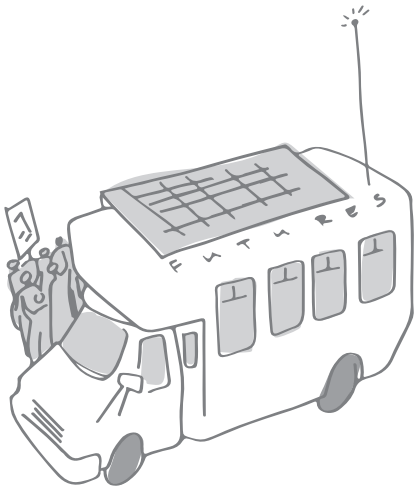


Photo: Timothy Tiebout, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Photo: Kevin Smith

Photo: Janneke Absil

"You Are Now Here," a workshop led by Black Quantum Futurism Collective, 2017



The Vehicle
Among other things, the MFI vehicle represents mobility and destination, and embodies the way in which accessibility allows for the ongoing building of our communities. Vehicles are a public experience of connection, access, and sustainability throughout the city. With the vehicle as its central location, the MFI visualizes an organization of space/time and individual/collective path-making. It exists across boundaries, amplifying a multiplicity of approaches while highlighting their intersectionalities. This is both a symbol and a practical tool to connect a network of locations representing many resilient futures in Philadelphia.

The Network
This vehicle travels along a programmed network that consists of three routes: *Mother Earth—Water Is Life, No More Carceral State,* and *Counter Narratives.* Each route tells a story through the passage and operation of the MFI. Programs with the MFI, developed by PHLA collaborators and their extended networks, use the following principles as their guide:

- **Cross-pollination**
  Exchanging ideas, themes, and experiences across locations along the network
- **Partnership and self-determination**
  What happens at a location in the network is determined through conversation and collaboration
- **Constellation**
  The network is a collection of points that tells a story beyond the sum of its parts; the vehicle helps to discover, create, connect, and build meaning in this process of collection
- **Social/Environmental/ Racial justice**
  The network embodies equitable and just futures
- **Time travel**
  Locations on the network are exploring the connections between past and present and future; re-claiming histories and decolonizing futures in the process

These stories are catalogued in words, art, and ephemera collected within the bus and showcased in the exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art's Perelman Building.

Routes

Mother Earth—Water Is Life
This route brings focus to ongoing forms of settler colonialism and environmental racism. Rooted in the recognition that we are on the ancestral and stolen land of the Lenni-Lenape people and influenced by the pan-Indigenous environmental movement from the Standing Rock Sioux resistance against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), the *Mother Earth—Water Is Life* route provides important platforms for these conversations within the context of Philadelphia's food justice and urban agriculture networks.

No More Carceral State
Drawing from the work and vision of Critical Resistance, we recognize abolition as a broad, expansive, and iterative strategy on the way to end the Carceral State. In their words, an abolitionist vision means that we must build models today that can represent how we want to live in the future with the goal of eliminating incarceration, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment. Through this route, we emphasize and uplift organizations and communities that continue to speak to the urgency of abolition, and the mindsets, skills, and habits we need to embrace to see this future come into being.

Cited from the Critical Resistance Abolition Organizing Toolkit, https://criticalresistance.org/resources/the-abolitionist-toolkit/.

Counter Narratives
A future is a story we carry through the world. It is our past as well as our sense of possibility that frames every decision we make. Sometimes we tell our own stories, and sometimes they are told through us. This route supports programming that troubles the dominant narrative, empowering us to tell our own stories.

Key Terms

Because we cannot work together towards multiple futures without changing the inequality on which this country was founded, it is important to take into account how neo-colonization, structural racism, and white privilege continue to exist in our everyday lives, in our workspace, in the museum, and in the city. The following terms have been integral in the process of unpacking this inequality, and bringing together ideas and programs in creative and collaborative expression as part of the Mobile Futures Institute.

Hetero-patriarchy

A social and political system in which men, often specifically cis-gendered men, and heterosexuality are given power and primacy over all other genders and sexual orientations, identities, and expressions. Those disempowered by this system include cis-gendered women, trans men and women, nonbinary and two-spirit people, and people with gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, questioning, or fluid identities, sexualities, and expressions. (A cis-gendered person is someone whose personal and gender identity corresponds with their biological sex.)

Radical Capitalism

According to Cedric Robinson, "Capitalism and racism, in other words, did not break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of 'racial capitalism' dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide. Capitalism was 'racial' not because of some conspiracy to divide workers or justify slavery and dispossession, but because racialism had already permeated Western feudal society."[1]

Structural Racism

Racial bias among institutions and across society. It involves the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of societal factors including the history, culture, ideology, and interactions of institutions and policies that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color. An example is the overwhelming number of depictions of people of color as criminals in mainstream media, which can influence how various institutions and individuals treat people of color with suspicion when they are shopping, traveling, or seeking housing and employment—all of which can result in discriminatory treatment and unequal outcomes.[2]

Settler-colonialism

A type of colonialism that functions by replacing indigenous populations with an invasive settler society that, over time, develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty.[3]

Neo-colonization

"In Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism, Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president and arguably one of Africa's most influential political leaders, posits his theory concerning an emerging phenomenon he describes as "neo-colonialism." According to Nkrumah, the general aim of neo-colonialism is economic domination at the satisfaction of a few.

1. In the case of Africa, this manifests itself as imperialistic power without responsibility.

2. Neo-colonialism in its cruelest form is the continuation of colonial policies under the guise of achieving freedom.

3. African nations rely on their formal imperial power or colonial "mother country" for defense and internal security. Imperialist nations advance their economic neo-colonial aspirations by various aid schemes under the guise of improving living standards and conditions. Meanwhile, such powers have little interest in developing the countries they aid or improving social aspects such as education.

4. Destructive military aid, rather than helpful multilateral aid, is often given due to competing imperialistic objectives from Western powers according to Nkrumah.

[1] Cited from Boston Review, http://bostonreview.net/race/robin-d-g-kelley-what-did-cedric-robinson-mean-racial-capitalism

[2] Cited from Race Forward, https://www.raceforward.org/research/reports/moving-race-conversation-forward

[3] Cited from Global Social Theory, https://globalsocialtheory.org/concepts/settler-colonialism.

5 The end result is Africa's mass amounts of natural resources are utilized to develop external Western nations such as the ≠United States, Western European countries, and Japan rather than their own economies. As African countries export and provide cheap raw materials to help imperialist powers industrialize, they simultaneously create spheres of influence while supplying such powers with a market for their expensive finished goods."[4]

White Privilege

Unearned advantages, resources, or immunity available to people identified as white, usually in Western societies. White privilege can manifest as: not having to think about one's race because whiteness is considered a "norm," seeing plentiful media representations of white people and minimal representations of people of color, living relatively free of overt racism and micro-aggressions, and having your race associated with privilege and access to spaces, social networks, and financial resources.[5]

Inter-sectionality

A term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black feminist legal academic who was concerned with the lack of appropriate support for women of color under the US judicial system. Intersectionality was meant specifically to intervene against legal systems that disadvantaged women of color: when going to report injustices as a form of gendered discrimination, they were told it was discrimination against their race, or vice versa. This remarginalized women of color and left them with little protection under the legal system.

Since the term was created, it has been picked up as a useful term to analyze the experiences of different minority groups (most prominently within gender studies). Its overall benefit is that it shows how people who are categorized or stereotyped in two or more ways can experience these things together rather than separating these experiences from one another superficially.[6]

[4] Cited from E-International Relations, http://www.e-ir.info/2016/01/13/navigating-nkrumahs-theory-of-neo-colonialism-in-the-21st-century/

[5] Cited from the Washinton Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/01/16/white-privilege-explained

[6] Cited from Global Social Theory, http://globalsocialtheory.org/concepts/intersectionality/

Radical Inclusivity

Unpacking layers of oppression and privilege by honoring differences and commonalities.

Decolonization

Decolonization + indigenous futures lens "...for those who have settled here, we have a history of interruption to recognize and rectify; as Waziyatawin (in this issue) notes, Indigenous peoples recognized, from the beginning, how Western thought and presence displaced and endangered Indigenous ways of knowing and relationships to the earth, as well as the earth itself. We have a responsibility to honor the Indigenous 'laws of the land' and to restore right relationships. Often the call for sustainability and ecological responsibility is framed from a settler vantage point, in belief that "this land is your land, this land is my land" so we must take care of it. For those of us who are not Indigenous to Turtle Island, we must recognize our particular responsibility to this land and its stewards. All of this is interwoven into this work and our beginning point. As such, the starting point of decolonization is not a rejection of colonialism. Rather than replace the dominant with the marginalized, or as Fanon (1968) puts it, make it so "the last shall be first and the first last" (p. 37), the decolonizing project seeks to reimagine and rearticulate power, change, and knowledge through a multiplicity of epistimologies, ontologies and axiologies. Decolonization cannot take place without contestation. It must necessarily push back against the colonial relations of power that threaten Indigenous ways of being. Alfred (2009b) and others have suggested that decolonization can only be "achieved through the resurgence of an Indigenous consciousness channeled into contention with colonialism" (p. 48; emphasis IV Sium, Desai & Ritskes added). Indigenous knowledges are the starting point for resurgence and decolonization, are the medium through which we engage in the present, and are the possibility of an Indigenous future. Without this power base, decolonization becomes a domesticated industry of ideas. Decolonization is not always about the co-existence of knowledges, nor knowledge synthesis, which inevitably centers colonial logic. Whiteness does not 'play well with others' but, rather, fragments and marginalizes—so it must be asked: Co-existence at what cost and for whose benefit? Decolonization necessarily unsettles. In the face of the beast of

colonialism, thirsty for the blood of Indigeneity and drunk on conquest, assimilation is submission and de-colonization calls on those who will "beat the beast into submission and teach it to behave" (Alfred, 2009a, p. 37)."[7]

Mainstream lens "refers to the undoing of colonialism, the establishment of governance or authority through the creation of settlements by another country or jurisdiction. The term generally refers to the achievement of independence by the various Western colonies and protectorates in Asia and [Africa]] following World War II. This conforms with an intellectual movement known as Post-Colonialism. A particularly active period of decolonization occurred between 1945 to 1960, beginning with the independence of Pakistan and the Republic of India from Great Britain in 1947 and the First Indochina War. Some national liberation movements were established before the war, but most did not achieve their aims until after it. Decolonization can be achieved by attaining independence, integrating with the administering power or another state, or establishing a "free association" status. The United Nations has stated that in the process of decolonization there is no alternative to the principle of self-determination."[8]

[7] Cited from Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society Journal, http://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/18638

[8] Cited from New World Encyclopedia, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Decolonization

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