

Filipina/x/o's De-Centering in Solidarity For Black Lives

Speech Presentation by DJ Kuttin Kandi

at FilAm Arts' Filipinx for Black Lives Activist Panel on June 13, 2020

First, I want to acknowledge that we are gathered here today while we are here on the traditional land of indigenous Peoples of past and present, and I honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations, including where i currently reside on the unceded territory of the Kumeyaay Nation

My name is kandi, pronouns she/her/hers. I am grateful for the space that has been given to me to speak on what does it mean to be in Solidarity for and with Black Lives

It is important to know that a lot of what I will say today - a lot of my words and the work that I do is nothing new. It is based on the legacy work of ancestral leaders before us - Black abolitionists, Black feminists who came before me, countless and too many to name, Organizers who have inspired and shaped my learning - folx like Rosa Clemente, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, Black and Brown people in Hip Hop who have politicized me with the critical consciousness I have today, asian solidarity-movement leaders like Grace Lee Boggs, Yuri Kochiyama who have taught me what solidarity looks like and should be.

I needed to start with this because I struggled with taking up space. We must understand that what we do/say/ has been said by the most impacted, the most vulnerable out of the already most vulnerable, those at the margins who do not have this platform - many whom are also Organizers who have been saying and doing this work, have long ago been saying Black Lives Matter, have long ago been saying Defund the Police like my good friend Cat brooks with DefundOPD in Oakland. All of these are the folx who have been out on the streets, people who have been risking their lives even while under covid-19, out on the frontlines - because Organizers are frontline workers too - out there fighting for their freedom and all of ours everyday.

I say all this - because in order for us to even understand what solidarity even means is to start with the understanding that Black people and Black communities have BEEN fighting for their liberation everyday for over 400

years while here on this stolen land from indigenous peoples - this land stolen by, with and through white supremacy heteropatriarchy. we must come to the understanding that anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism is the fulcrum (Nakagawa, S.) and the blueprint of white supremacy and how it functions. Dr. Connie Wun had shared at one of our People's Collective for justice and Liberation town hall that, "anti-Asian Racism exists and is made possible by anti-Blackness and anti-indigeneity."

So when we get to this foundational pillar and understanding we can then begin the work of addressing the ways in which we have been, conditioned to be - and currently are - anti-Black, and that we have already perpetuated and currently are still perpetuating anti-Black racism and being anti-indigenous. Speaking of which, as a non-indigenous person in solidarity with indigenous peoples, it is important to say that aboriginal Aeta and Igorot tribes cannot be used as a prop to address anti-Blackness; especially when aboriginal indigenous peoples who btw are consistently faced with oppression and displacement... we must respect the creation of their own stories that roots them to their lands and we must actively show up for them as well beyond just acknowledgement but in action.

So, It matters where we begin our understandings - we must start with de-centering ourselves. What I mean is this - we must center those who are at the margins - disabled Black femmes, queers, non binary and trans peoples. it is imperative that we honor all the intersection of identities by lifting them up, creating space, moving back and lifting their demands, respecting their autonomy and agency.. and self-determination.

To decenter means to get to black feminist, bell hooks concept of self-actualization where we must recognize our privileges and our own positionalities. We must move from a place of self-actualization towards a community/collective actualization, that does more than just acknowledge our privileges but actually address it by moving towards collective action for collective liberation.

To decenter means we must actually go back to the "I" and reckon with the ways we have been and are anti-Black - no, not start with "they have been complicit".. but starting with the "I." "I have been complicit... I have been anti-black." It was Critical Race scholar George Lipsitz who said

“white supremacy is an equal opportunity employer,” so thus the practice of whiteness is not exclusive to folks with white skin. So because of colonization functioning as a pillar of white supremacy — we have been conditioned to enact white supremacy and to buy into the race to attain whiteness; to buy into the model minority myth and where Asian Americans have been used as the racial wedge between white and Black peoples.

Hence, I am/we are not exclusive to embodying, enacting and perpetuating anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism and other forms of oppression. I am/and we are not infallible.

It is a daily practice to decenter, to decolonize and to check my privileges and to examine my own actions. It takes a shedding of the ego and the humbleness to be able to reflect and to admit. Then it takes work to not just acknowledge but the work to dismantle anti-blackness.

Because white supremacy has taught us to hate ourselves and to hate one another - it must be a constant practice to decenter. I don't know everything; and we are going to make mistakes. But we are not striving for perfection - rather we are striving to get to freedom. And we can't get there if we refuse to look at ourselves honestly, a willingness to go inward in order to decenter ourselves.

Also, I want to lift up that while there is an importance of lifting up our own struggles and lift up the narratives of our Filipina/x/o's who have been co-conspirators to Black lives — we must also remember that this is not about us. the oppressive impacts that we face as Filipina/x/o's face are not the same impacts as what Black people experience everyday.

And yes while it IS important to note that we have attained our own equity off the backs of Black people, Civil Rights and Black liberation movements - and how we may share how our struggles may intertwine or how Black folx have shown up for us - to name this Hxstory. this is not why we must show up for Black folx - we must show up because this is what humanization and solidarity means - to expand more than just the idea of love but to be about revolutionary love. This is about justice. If we say that our freedom is bound together - we must know that our freedom is not tied into some transactional notion of reinforcing individual capitalistic

process of “unity.” This is not how it works to be in solidarity. We do this because we must love with freedom on our hearts and minds in movement-building work.

We’ve got work to do. And our work is to work within ourselves and then our communities, our loved ones, and then to build and deepen our relationships within and across our communities. To foster the practice of community/collective care - where we look out for one another especially because the call to Defund the Police by the Movement for Black Lives is one action out of many towards an abolition culture. Coalition building is the key to how we get to collective liberation - it is where we learn how to do better and how to show up. We must build our pods - look to the work of Mia Mingus, the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective, Disability Justice Organizers and Transformative Justice Organizers who laid this work before us like Black abolitionist Mariame Kaba who said, ‘a “safe” world is not one in which the police keep black and other marginalized people in check through threats of arrest, incarceration, violence and death.’ And I think about Allyson’s last question on the first panel - about what will need to let go of - I’ll say - we need to let go of capitalism, upward mobility, the proximity to whiteness, the institutions, the systems that are in place that keep us tied to them - because it was Audre Lorde that has always taught us that “the masters tools will never dismantle the masters house.”

Additionally, We must be open to the call in’s and be open to the call out’s because I believe that these 2 can/should/and does co-exist especially when our emotions and the harms done speaks into existence our lived experiences. Because I don’t believe in respectability politics of controlling what people feel or say or how they should say it. I am not talking about Disposability - canceling people. But in truth - as noted by my friend Gilbert Daniel, “what celebrity or any person of high power has ever really been ‘cancelled’.” I have learned from being both called in and called out. As an abolitionist I do not believe in throwing away people. I believe in Transformative Justice work - I must believe in restoration. I believe in redefining what safety and security means for us so because of this I look to the work of Southeast Asians from Freedom Inc who laid out a process for us on how to respond when oppression happens upon us, to us and around us. - especially in this time as we must move away from reformist platforms and towards dreaming abolition into fruition.

This is the moment to build anew - and create the world that is needed where everyone is not just seen but where Black folx and oppressed peoples are genuinely loved whole. and if we are privileged - we've got to take risks, be brave, imagine big enough where we are creating alternative community based models of Transformative Justice where we show up for our own - because like the name of our mutual co-founded by my friend Christina — we all we got.

And if we are all we got - then it is a must that we be transformative - we must admit when we harm each other. Believe people when they say we have harmed them even when we have been unintentional in this harm. Because it is not an excuse to not recognize the ways we are so privileged that we cannot work towards naming and genuinely rectifying - not just by apologizing but actively moving away from the culture of policing and towards fostering and creating a culture of transformative accountability weaved within and throughout our communities.

Lastly, as a long time Hip Hop DJ/ Turntablist and Feminist - I must say this to all of us who participate, contribute, perform and live Hip Hop - we must understand that as Filipina/x/o's — we are merely just GUESTS invited to contribute to Hip Hop culture which means we have a responsibility to do justice by Hip Hop as it was created during a time of oppression upon Black and Brown youth of the South Bronx - it is a culture that is rooted and IS Black culture. While it has always been stated by Hip Hop pioneers that “Hip Hop is Universal” we will need to be grounded in principles that guides us into understanding that the only way to be truly universal is that we debunk this ****color-erasure**** rhetoric of “universal”, center those who have been marginalized and address anti-black racism and hetero-patriarchy.

When we are grounded in the belief that “*when Black people get free, everybody gets free*”; when we continue to address anti-blackness and the state-sanctioned violence happening to all black lives; when we move beyond the passive term of “allyship” and actually work in genuine solidarity of protecting, affirming, acknowledging all black lives then we can say we have arrived at a true universal Hip Hop. We must but be able to call out and/or call in our beloved icons. And understand that this is about movements and not idols.

It means that for those of us in Hip Hop we must be Pro-Black and co-conspirators to Black liberation movements as well as be anti-homophobic; anti-transphobic, anti-queerphobic, anti-ableist, anti-fatphobic, we will call out racism as we make a stance against rape culture; so as we say Justice for Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor we must also say Nina Pop and Tony McDade. Because we know Black Trans Lives Matter - we must also know that that all forms of oppression are connected.

This is about justice and solidarity. This is about the Movement for Black Lives. This is about how we wage love for ourselves and one another — with a righteous rage alongside our Black siblings for their freedom and for all of our collective liberation.

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Cited Resources:

Peoples Collective for Justice and Liberation:

<https://www.peoplescollective4jL.org>

Asian Solidarity Collective: <https://www.asiansolidaritycollective.org>

Mariame Kaba Article:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/opinion/sunday/floyd-abolish-defund-police.html>

Open Letter from Freedom Inc's Southeast Asian Team on COVID-19 and Black Solidarity:

<https://madison365.com/open-letter-freedom-inc-southeast-asian-team-covid-19-black-solidarity/>

Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective: <https://batjc.wordpress.com/>

Transform Harm:

https://transformharm.org/abolition/?fbclid=IwAR0cMpl-EMz4HLiSRTsnN-kqtrIZMz1ceadWhYitK-zuZ_OJIRNaPTv_jiQ

Black and Asian American Feminist Solidarities: A Reading List:

<https://www.blackwomenradicals.com/blog-feed/black-and-asian-feminist-solidarities-a-reading-list?fbclid=IwAR3k3VAHTmK9X8uO4S8MbLB-AwttVgF7dP12MrYcbCjh6do9nVFgrly0PyA>

Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement - <https://www.akpress.org/beyond-survival.html>

Scot Nakagawa: Dismantling The Fulcrum of White Supremacy

<https://lauraflanders.org/2012/08/scot-nakagawa-dismantling-the-fulcrum-of-white-supremacy/>