Black Feminism and Me/Maine Webinar

University of Maine Alumni Association

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so welcome to black feminism and me
slash maine
before i formally introduce and address
the intention of tonight's event
i want to start with a call to action
and perhaps this is something you have
already deeply considered
but if not i would like to encourage
everyone to reflect on the land with
which your memories and your being has
been
and is being developed on
specifically i implore you to
acknowledge those lives that have
cultivated and developed a deep
connection and practice with mother
earth
the university of maine located on marsh
island is the homeland of the penobscot
country the indigenous people who continue to
tend to and fight for the rights of the
land and river
I want to take a moment to honor the members of the Penobscot Nation in the state of Maine and the Nanticoke Lenape Nation of New Jersey where I am currently. Whose generations of life love resistance, perseverance, I recognize and support. I benefit and reside on this land that gave me opportunity to have memories and experience my own growth from the soil that the indigenous people expertly tended for more than my brain can comprehend. And I want to call to attention the complexities of knowing and existing with this reality. I encourage the audience to learn more about their local indigenous communities. Bell Hooks famously said quote when we drop fear we can draw nearer to people, we can draw nearer to the earth.
we can draw nearer to all the heavenly creatures that surround us and tonight i have the pleasure of facilitating this roundtable dialogue with five heavenly women i am honored to have connected with during my time in maine amara ephesia who is the director of youth engagement and policy of the maine environmental education association and a national geographic young explorer kosia feige youth hub coordinator for the maine environmental education association dr laurie banks assistant professor of biology at bates college dr sama of durakeeb associate director of the maine humanities council and dr leslie hill professor emeritus of politics at bates college over the course of the semester i've had the privilege of inviting you all to speak with me on a podcast
project that will be released very soon
called black feminism and me slash maine
where we collectively covered a broad
spectrum of topics such as
intersectional black feminism
nature
youth activism
and stem as they pertain to black
feminist ways of knowing and being
tonight's dialogue is an opportunity to
once again have a platform to center and
uplift the voices of black feminists
for those of you who may not know this
tonight's event and the associated
podcasts are so are connected to a
university of maine class offered this
semester
called black feminist thought and
expression
and i want to extend a special welcome
to the students of this class as well as
my co-instructors dr liliana harakova
and mr kevin roberge i see you both it's
good to see you
i would like to take the time to address the folks watching this to say thank you for bearing witness to us whether it's in this zoom webinar tonight or once this recording is published we are grateful for your compassionate listening as we unpack our individual understanding and personal connection to black feminism before we jump into the questions does anyone feel called to say a few words before we open the dialogue any one of the panelists specifically looks like i'm just really excited thank you lauren um for inviting us i'm just really excited to have this conversation i know we have a set number of questions but i just know that conversation is just going to flourish from there so
i'm excited about tonight yeah me too
absolutely okay well let's let's get
into our first
our first facilitation question so
what was your path to and through black feminism both thinking and doing and how does it relate to your experience and i'm going to throw it to simma first um how to go first thank you so i love this question because i always love like an origin story um and i feel like that's what this question is and so i think um you know if i had to cite like a a human being close to me i would have to cite my mother who raised me and she um and she never talked about black feminism in any kind of like um explicit way i grew up in a house where we talked about black politics and black people all the time but my mother
was not someone who said oh i am a feminist i am a black feminist but it
she um
i guess i would say that she brought me to black feminism just by example and by her from her the expectations that she set for me and the path that she that she imagined me walking on and um and all of the literature that she introduced me to and so if i were to cite like a like a a a people or uh black feminists who are not you know who who who shape my first learning i guess i would say literature um black writers black women writers who shaped my imagination so i grew up reading a lot of virginia hamilton which um
all of her writing really helped me think differently about just about speculative writing um and the place of black folks in the present and the future and all of you know magical capabilities um and then i think about the black feminists who shape my identity people like audrey lord who i talk about all the time i will not delve into audrey lord right at the moment but then the black feminists um the black women um who shaped my politics like angela davis and bell hooks and june jordan so i think um those are the those are the that's where i that's where like my root my black
07:11 feminist root that's where it comes from
07:18 sorry technical issue thank you so much
07:20 and it also reminded me of the fact that
07:22 i know everyone um in this room tonight
07:25 is going to ask
07:26 if we can give a list of like
07:28 recommended reading and people and so
07:30 i'm keeping notes
07:32 for that inevitable question that always
07:34 comes up um and i want to throw it to
07:37 cosy next
07:39 to to respond
07:42 yeah
07:43 so um i guess for me
07:45 um
07:46 i've just kind of always been around
07:50 super cool and inspirational black women
07:53 in my life
07:54 um
07:56 as a um coming from
07:59 you know a big group of
08:01 nigerian-american immigrants
08:03 um just seeing
the
um black women in my life just
do everything that they can
to
establish themselves and to make
themselves seen and heard in a place and
an environment that does not want them
to be seen and heard
and you know doing so
successfully
it was always really inspiring to me and
so
you know even
without being conscious of that label of
being a black feminist
i still understood
and you know emulated the actions
and the mindsets of the women around me
so yeah that's what i would have to say
and that sounds like a very dynamic
introduction and experience because you
know not every obvious i i hate that i
even have to say this but not every
black woman is the same we don't all think alike we all have different nuances that are to be celebrated and to be cherished and i feel that and i feel like just by knowing you i see the multiplicity of you know your sister's influence and you know maybe some of your aunts and things like that and it's just really um it's really beautiful to to call do that and acknowledge that really um so lori dr banks sorry yeah so um oh can you guys see me there we go okay um my first best friends were my paternal grandmother who was originally from cegelent alabama it's on the state line of alabama and mississippi
and her sisters and her sisters-in-laws my grandfather's sisters and so i came into this sort of pre-existing sisterhood if you will um when they were all in their late 50s and early 60s which i think is in sort of a magical point in a black woman's life where like all your cares go away your respect for other people's expectations are gone and all of those things um and so having them you know in my life very early uh and being you know really good examples of resilience um and really kind of you know given it to people when
they tried to impose their expectations on these women and the women being like not today satan um definitely had a huge impact on me not just because they were fabulous in the kitchen where which is where my biochemistry training started um you know but also realizing that as i encountered the world in my body with my hair and my skin and my curves and all of these things that i really had a choice as to whether i was going to pay attention to other people's expectations of who they thought i should be or not um and so thankfully you know through these wonderful examples of these women um i really obviously took the latter past where it was like you know my
beauty my genius whatever it is that i
feel like god has imparted me with um
doesn't really require
your permission um and it doesn't
require your understanding either
because that's between me and him we got
stuff to do
um and so i have to say that's number
one where it started
um but i'm really grateful for that that
i had that example of these women who
had the lived experience
um to really
walk that in a way
that you know in in some of the days
that they experienced it wasn't super
easy right
um but to pass on to me like look
we have fought these battles
so that you would have different kinds
of opportunities
and especially because you have these
opportunities now we need you to go out
there and you know kick some doors down
so um that was where it started yeah
northern alabama
going down there for um summer vacation
uh since i was raised in seattle um
but yeah um you know at lots of kitchen
tables
learning you know the black feminist
version of global domination and it
followed me
okay i don't know how long
the awkward silence lasted but i just
got the my internet is unstable which
just reminds me that
internet
access to water having a computer these
are all privileges
and mult other things as well so i just
just tying that in there connectivity
issues
um our
first world problems
so
thank you dr banks for bringing us a back to a sense of um place in the south where you grew up um and also talking about how you know you're instantly connected to your family who also help you connect um to your ancestors and really give you the strength to persevere at any point in time right so amara you are my next my next person okay amara can is having an issue on muting her oh there we go there we go awesome sorry about that um let's see firstly thank you everyone so much for for sharing your stories your origin stories um i'm just
i know my face is going to be hurting at the end of this night as i smile um so i'm yeah i'm just so excited and looking forward to the rest of this conversation um as far as my origin stories my path to and through black feminism goes um as my sister mentioned i am incredibly grateful that i had the opportunity to be surrounded by really incredible black women who were unapologetically and are upon apologetically themselves in all that they do who really served as a source for inspiration for me especially in my most formative years before i was nine and then when i was nine i moved to maine and that was a very different experience because a lot of these women who i had in community they were several hundreds of miles away
and
starting from age nine through
i would say just about
my
my years of high school so just a few years ago
those times were pretty tough as i was growing into myself and it felt like really for me a rediscovery of black feminism because although i still had folks in my corner i had less of those folks and i didn't really see these i didn't really see this embodied in the field or the passions that i wanted to pursue so i kind of had to rediscover on my own you know who are those folks that i could look to turn to who can be a source of inspiration in
this work that looks like and has always continued to have a single narrative a lot of these passions that i had and so in my rediscovery of black feminism in my middle school and high school years i was so grateful to always have my mother as a constant i don't think i can articulate in words the uh just the profound impact my mom has had on me the sacrifices that she's made um and her being the embodiment of what she hoped that my sister and i would pursue to follow your passions irrespective of whatever barriers society says that you have
and recognizing that you're the only person who can name your barriers um and if you name none you truly have none and she really embodied that so much and i'm so grateful to her for that um another person i really just so looked up to who um i guess i attribute to my rediscovery of black feminism is um councilwoman angela okafor who is a counselor in bangor and a really close family friend who has taught me that being the jack of all trades is um it's definitely something that is very difficult but it's also really amazing to be able to pursue uh multiple endeavors and that black women should not silo themselves
to one area of advocacy or one hobby or
one passion that we are allowed to and
we have the right to pursue multiple
interests and passions
um as anyone should
when it comes to policy and specific
scientific policy
i'm grateful for ayanna elizabeth
johnson who is
one of the leaders the forefront leaders
in the climate women in the climate
movement
and who's really inspired me to
transform my lens from a scientific lens
to a more social oriented lens when it
comes to climate generation
solution generation
and lastly i um i really thank the black
women that i have as friends
who i didn't have opportunities to have
um
friends who shared my lived experiences
before i came to college actually
um and it's just in these two years that
i've had these friends that
it has been so refreshing
to not have to code switch in
correction to actually be able to like
say how i'm feeling um and people
understand because they're going through
the same thing i can share my passions
and it doesn't have to be this is my
struggle because of something i can just
say this is my struggle and they
understand it um so i'm so grateful for
for all of these women
uh for
um being a part of my origin story when
it comes to my journey with black
feminism
thank you amara every time
you answer a question i'm like oh my
gosh you're so eloquent like i can't
i'm like
it's so
clear like i wish my brain worked like
that and you mentioned you're gonna be smiling through this whole thing i'm gonna be like trying to not cry and smile and like just forget everything because i'm so emotionally tethered to all of you this evening i did want to just highlight something that you said that really sticks out to me as we think and talk about black feminism you know it's more than just the theory that comes from incredible black women who spend you know their entire lives writing and allowing other people to connect to their experiences they meaning the other person and also they themselves um and i just want to draw attention to so many people who you've named that are both scholars and
also
um
just
a black woman existing
that
is already enough to be in this tribe of
black feminists black feminism excuse me
um and so
dr hill you're
you're the last
um and but not the least
person to respond um to this first
question
thank you lauren and um
i like other as others have said i
appreciate the the stories i'm hearing
what i'm getting is a way
are the
a way to think about the multiple paths
through which we've come to
our thinking about black feminism
i hear echoes of my own experience and
some of what others have said but let me
just say that my path into black feminism started with reading thinking and talking about black women's writing at tony k bombara's kitchen table kitchen tables figure very prominently i think in the connections we have in the learning that we've done fiction essays and poetry by alice walker tony k tony morrison audrey lord bell hooks barbara smith gloria and zelda and tazaki shange and the kambahi river collective part of the early kind of uh awakening opening of my head to thinking about black women's experiences their presence in the world and the particular ways in which we understood how the world operated and how power operated
those 1980s conversations were my own adult version of the kinds of kitchen table talk I had witnessed as a kid among women in my family and in my mother's conversations with her friends confidants women I called my aunties often these four mothers were intentionally or not um passing on stories of being a woman in their world being good mothers and wives surviving work and whatever the world threw at them and of course being healthy often the lessons were about taking care of self of uplifting the race and protecting the family indeed what I think now of as the patriarchal family [Music] later I found theorizing by Kimberly Credショップ Jersey Hill Collins and Black South African women activists legal scholars like Patricia Williams of
scholar activists angela davis kathy
cohen polygon allen
chandra mohanty margo okazawa ray and
amina mama
their accounts and analyses developed my
own feminist perspectives
and ideas about black feminism about
intersectionality about global feminism
and ways of being in the world
and enacting a black feminist politics
in our interpersonal relationships in
our communities and in our world
so lots of ideas coming at me processing
things trying to figure things out for
myself and as i thought about this
question about path it occurred to me to
point out a couple of things that stand
out and one is that
there's an ongoing process
of the development of black feminists
developing black feminist thought
and for each of us and for us
together
uh growing into our black feminist perspectives

there's an ongoing process of learning
to claim

and to honor our womanhood as we engage in anti-racist struggles

the thing that stands out i recall very vividly when i first entered graduate school angela davis came to my campus at atlanta university and declared very publicly that she was not a feminist

and look at where she is now so

so you know the it's okay to think and and and to interact and you know call ourselves out on various kinds of things

the other thing that comes forward is uh from from all of those experiences that i had the thinking the talking the interacting the activism

was the
were the fundamental conceptual linkages the symbolic linkages and word and cultural images and the everyday practical linkages between racism economic exploitation and gender sexism and heterosexist depression that they're there in many ways one can see reflections of of those whether we're focused on one of those isms or another the the other thing about my path is that a lot of the thinking the reading came of course because of activism some of it was electoral campaigns the anti-apartheid solidarity movement was very important to me co-convening anti-racist feminist workshops in charlotte north carolina finding
fellow learners until I entered an interdisciplinary undergraduate program a graduate program where I was encouraged to make race and gender politics the subject of inquiry for my own scholarship and learning so um reading thinking talking doing and um all of that involved bringing a a blackened intersectional feminist lens to the tasks I encounter to the institutions that I've worked in and as it relates to my experience black feminism helps me make sense of the world how power is distributed how it's reproduced how it is or can be challenged in the
world i saw women doing it i saw women make envisioning how to do it and it offers me space and guidance for thinking about my own ways to respond to it you always leave me speechless it's like i just i don't eat i uh there's too much going on in my brain right now but i just really want to say that i personally feel feel the words and can the way you've described your your journey and your path was just very vivid um and also steeped like with some of the giants of um of you know the revolution and i i wish i wish i could have
28:04
i mean i wish i was 50 i guess is what
28:06
i'm saying at that age in my life
28:09
where i'm at my peak
28:11
um
28:13
yeah so thank you thank you dr hill
28:16
okay so our next question um
28:19
is how does identifying as a black
28:22
feminist
28:24
play out in your actions and choices
28:27
i've definitely
28:28
as dr hill has been pointing out have
28:30
heard a lot of
28:33
echoes of connecting to mothering
28:37
connecting to that community
28:39
connecting to scholars in the words of
28:42
black women um
28:44
and so as i think about
28:47
actions and choices
28:49
um
28:50
it reminds me of the ways in which and
28:52
this is just a personal anecdote as i
28:55
get older i grow into being a version of
28:58
my mother
and closer to her and more understanding of her than I was when I was say like 16 right. That's just my own personal connection to this question but again that we don't have to go down the rabbit hole of motherhood or mothering but um does anyone want to start by talking about how they identify um as a black feminist in their actions and choices. Yeah I'll be brave and start so I would say for me um black feminism has kind of shaped my mindset just the way that I feel the world in terms of both gender and race and so for me understanding the fact that um
because black people are seen as the antithesis of white people, black women, um especially are viewed as not feminine or unable to be feminine because the fact that white women are seen as the epitome of femininity and because of that you know you know growing up i kind of did struggle with understanding my place as a woman a black woman but i've come to realize of recently that because those systems weren't created for me then i don't don't need to need to abide by them i don't need to listen to
them i don't
i can
disassociate myself with those systems
because they're not for me so if they're
not for me
why would i abide by them
and so that mindset is just
kind of where
you know my actions my choices the way
that i identify
you know where that has led me
so i guess for me that's just a
brief overview
oh thank you i instantly as you were
talking was thinking about
um
hair
right and the politics of hair
um let alone
the rest of our phenotypes that
are now being emulated
in popular culture um
but yeah it's
i like i like that outlook it's more hopeful it's more hopeful than i feel like i am on some of my days where i too struggle um with eurocentric standards of beauty so thank you for that yeah it's just so oh i don't know if i'm kind of well i'm just going to stay off mute now because affirming mouth noises i've been making them but i'm on mute but cozy what you said is so um i just imagine that must have been like a powerful set of moments for you to like recognize that that that all of those systems and all of those standards that exist like you know that they don't need to we
don't need to map them on to our lives
and there are you know there's like a
whole
line
lineage of
people
before us
who have their own systems and standards
so i just think that i imagine that must
be very powerful
um
so
this question i feel like it can just
like keep unfolding unfolding but one of
the one of the ways that my
that
black feminism shapes my actions and my
thinking is that it it
it helps me
not
leave any part of myself behind
right so
um
so it gave me an opportunity to bring my whole self all my identities to whatever the issue is that I'm working on or talking about or advocating for. I think it was terrible with quoting people but I believe Audre Lorde said something to the effect of you know that there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we don't lead single-issue lives and I see her as talking about black women are just like taking the idea of black feminism black folks just in general just taking the idea of black feminism and
recognizing that whatever whatever um
the particular
um issue is that is activating
mainstream feminism
is inevitably inevitably going to be
look different
from the perspective
of a black feminist or a black woman or
a black person
and so i just so one of the things that
black feminism does is just broaden my
thinking and allow me to
to
to bring
all of my different perspectives to
whatever whatever the issue is
and now i'm going to stay off mute
dr banks it looked like you were also
okay yeah
so it just uh spoke to me i will say um
you know where this conversation is
going now with this question
um because i oddly enough was having
similar thoughts right um so small back

story on this couple months ago

i have a research laboratory uh that i

run here at bates uh in addition to my

regular teaching duties

um and

um my productivity had gone down because

a number of students had to quarantine

and such right so if you don't have

anybody working in the lab the

experiments just don't get done

uh and so a really really really good

girlfriend of mine um that i went to

graduate school with

um

just inboxed me and was like i feel like

this is a cry for help i've been trying

to get back in the lab anyway

if i come up there for a week can we

just hash it out like we were in grad

school again

and get these experiments done so she
flew from houston to maine and was like as long as you feed me while i'm here and i got somewhere to lay down let's get in this lab and drink this coffee and we can get it done and so in this fabulous experience of she and i so of course we are children of the late 90s right we are in the lab there's no students present so we have all of the little john and the eastside boys ti playing in the lab and all of this because it's me and keisha right it's her name um and so in this glorious moment of us feeling ourselves and feeling our science she said the most striking thing to me and i just have not let this go yet that had graduate school been like this we
would not have had the struggles that we had and took it a step further and was like who could we be and what could we accomplish if nobody was paying attention to our hair or the colloquial english that we used or our skin tone or the food that we eat with the music that we listen to and telling us that we should be somebody else if we could just concentrate on the work like what could we get done and so um that just obviously was incredibly profound with keisha to say that um but i have sort of taken that as you know in this moment particularly for she and i who are in our late 30s early 40s right um in these really interesting points in our career where we're done
with our training
and we're you know starting to make the
boss moves and stuff
what are ways that we can sort of
inject this black girl magic into
the universe
so that we are creating these
environments and creating these spaces
where people have just the freedom to be
the way that they are
and if trap music helps you concentrate
better than bach
then go concentrate and do what you need
to do
um
but you know in
creating these spaces in environments
where people can just be themselves
and do whatever flows out of them in
those moments
um and so it's really neat to be
at this point where i have the ability
to create those spaces in my laboratory
in my classroom or in some of the other advisory things i do outside of the college um to really give other people now the permission to be themselves um and so while it seems to be incredibly important for the people that i advise who are other younger black women it's amazing how like shielded everybody else also feels um you know in trying to fit into this box where it's like you weren't intended to be in a box you were intended to do whatever it was you were created to do um and so it's really been interesting and fun to be at a stage where i can just make that happen or at least give other people
the perception that they can do that and
like they're allowed to so
yeah it's it's fun at this part
say lori dr banks never in my life have
i heard anyone say feeling feeling my
science
never in my life but
now now i have and i will probably never
have to use it but i hope maybe one day
i might be able to
well i'm hanging on to black injecting
black girl magic into the world i love
that
um but it also reminds me of something
loretta ross said here
uh in maine um
a couple of years ago at a at a
maine women's policy center conference
she talked about
she talked about one of the radical
healing
uh and i'm that's that's the term and
i've i've heard recently but but
she was talking about envisioning and advocating for a world in which uh individual well-being as and it comes from creating the kinds of social and natural environments that support everybody's survival and ability to thrive she talked about you know this whole concept of healing justice where what we pursue and what we do in the world is about bringing healing and if that means injecting black girl magic into viral biology dr banks hey i'm all for it it's uh it's it's wonderful to hear you talk about it and it also makes me think that that here's here's an example of something that i think goes on in black feminism and that is that on a on a personal level like for me it nudges me in the direction of
claiming myself claiming my own knowledge claiming my own skills and abilities and who i want to be in the world and doing what i need to do to be well and thrive so it means playing your music shutting out the world in order to to do do the things that that are important to me to do it's also it reminds me of uh well black feminism it just what what you're talking about is is putting black women in the world in a way that says we're fully human and can make those kinds of contributions to to the world i love it thank you thank you so much yeah we're on standby silence is healthy too
you know okay so i am gonna stay off of me um for the rest of the conversation so that doesn't happen again um oh my goodness i have the jetters um i resonate so much with what everyone has said um and really for me um what i feel as though it was embodied in especially your response lori was that uh the fear of conforming to like society's assumptions of me and negative perceptions of me as a black woman was really holding me back it was preventing me in a lot of different spaces and i would say to some extent because my journey my personal journey is ever evolving to a certain extent not as much as it used to it is still preventing me but that is something that i'm working
on that's something that i actively track myself on especially in scientific spaces especially in academia i was so scared of being or conforming to that angry black woman trope um i was scared that i wouldn't live up to those eurocentric ideals uh that you um cosey named as well as lauren named that were literally never meant for me they have nothing to do with me they just served as the marker to exclude me um in terms of beauty um but you know beauty is not something that is one way beauty is how you carry yourself um how you the way you walk in the world
and because i was so scared of these assumptions i was so scared of conforming to these negative perspectives that society had of me i i really did not allow myself to speak up or speak out when i was asked about my opinion i wouldn't really i would just really conform with the masses even though i i felt different ways even though i felt this was wrong um even though i felt as though maybe with some of the experiences that i have maybe folks shouldn't say this but you know i am i am as an individual i'm scared of you know not having friends in a sense because they will see me as this angry black girl um they'll not want to sit with me at lunch and and that was the
conditioning from a very early age
i would say probably
fourth or fifth grade
that i could just allow people really to
to violate my personal space uh oh amara
your hair is so nice i want to touch it
just and just go ahead and grab it um
but you know everyone has right to their
personal space to their personal bubble
so why should i have mine be violated
but i didn't say anything again because
i did not want to conform to these um
societal perspectives of of black women
um and it's really in my journey my
personal journey um that i've realized
that
um
i don't care i really do not care
um because
people are always gonna find a way to
invalidate what i am saying what black
women are saying um and that is not on
me that is not
for me to stop what i am saying it's not
for me to stop walking the way that i do
it's not on me to conform it's really on
those individuals to change their
perspectives and their mindsets um
because like anyone
myself and other black women we have a
right to express
our opinions and our perspectives
without being vilified without being put
in our place without being put in a box
um
[Music]
so
really what this has culminated in is
um myself amara just just being me being
unapologetically myself uh and it's
taken some time for me to get here but
i'm so proud with the progress that i
have made in just being myself um as
laurie said just feeling my science or
feeling my advocacy and my passions and
and growing in myself and um discovering
what I love and learn and how to especially advocate for what I believe without again that fear of being vilified I think this is what this is how black feminism has played in my actions I guess kind of as as my journey through it as well um I would say that that's the origin story that I'm kind of I guess illustrating for myself with our conversation this evening it really seems like black feminism is a way for us um to articulate what we need and for that to be heard and listened to and it doesn't have to be done in the dark like we don't have to just sit if you're in college in your dorm room alone like struggling thinking
you know i need community you know and and it just for me it brings it that point brings it back to the university of maine and why it's so important to have spaces where black people feel like they are enough and they don't have to suffer in the dark and i really i'm really grateful that you know we have this event just as a testament to the fact that we're here in maine right and we're thriving in maine um and we're carving out our own spaces um and so that kind of leslie yeah finish your sentence oh no no you go that's all good i was just struck by something amara said and i i you know the the statement that people always find a way to invalidate me people will always find a way to
try to take the power away from from the things that i do it just makes me think of how invaluable community is how invaluable our connections to each other are and i have to say i was thinking about one of these questions about what lauren just referred to a minute ago spaces and spaces in maine where we can find community where we can find companionship um in maine i find it in friendships in encounters and conversations with people engaged in activities that support gender and racial justice i met three wonderful sisters one of whom is on this battle tonight during a grant making process for racial justice i mean it it feels like a bond that is with me
even though i see them sporadically
outdoor afro and the third place are
important spaces for me for connection
with bipoc folks
black girl in maine is a is a is a the
archive is a place where i could find
some grounding you know somebody who's
you know
doesn't make me feel like the thoughts
that i'm having or the reactions i'm
having to something are from from from
out there somewhere but really they're
grounded in a persp experience and
grounded in a persp experience and
perspective that is is is
validated
um and i find it when i challenge myself
to learn and to think about something
new or in a new way
like hearing people talk about
their different paths and their
experiences and the things that
influence them
that's another space where i
feel as if it's a space for me to grow so you know finding that those communities finding those conversations finding those connections that uh validate my experience but also challenge me in a way that helps me grow think perhaps differently those are very special to me yeah i'm thinking like um the validating experience and like i i always turn to black folks and black women uh to help me confirm and affirm whatever i think of as the truth um and so like thinking back to the that you know uh leslie talking about that grant making experience that we had to together i can re
I can remember uh being in the meeting the very first meeting and meeting you know and working with these three other black women and then um and having my own like uh Amara if you everyone always thinks that I am angry and I a lot of times I am angry because I have every right to be angry you know like if someone tried to touch my head I am angry don't violate my personal space just because you have some sort of curiosity so yeah I have sometimes I have a right to be angry but anyway so you know I have my own um I'm a very direct communicator and so people tend to think that that means that I am angry at them or or hurting them deeply and so I can remember at that the very first meeting I'm like trying to process all of the things that this grant making this grant making process something I'd
never really done before
and then um
but didn't really know you didn't really
know the two other black women well
uh and then i was at a farmers market in
portland
and uh
one of the people who we have been
sitting around that table maybe like
you know this is maybe the second
meeting or whatever um she was there
with her partner and she just kind of
pulled me aside and she said i've been i
was watching your face during the
meeting tell me what you really think
and i was like yes
you want to know what i really think
because
i don't know i just think that i just
always find that um
you know it
i guess i'm thinking back to i don't
remember who it was maybe cozy maybe
mara who was talking about just being
finding a community of black women when
you're in college that help affirm you
and help you
uh um
who
know you in some sense so you don't have
to code switch so you don't have to
think to yourself do i want to say this
thing that's on my mind right now or do
i want to wait for a little while and
so that people don't immediately think
that i'm being you know aggressive or
you know all that stuff
um and in that moment at that farmers
market when she came up to me and she
asked me that question i was like oh
all right
yes i'm so happy to be at that table
with you and
with the other two with all you know
with leslie you and the other person
yeah so anyway
um i just wanted to i had written down
the word truth when amar when you were
talking about being invalidated um
and i just think um
that's probably an experience that all
of us have had especially those of us
who've gone through any kind of
institution grad school jacked me up
just like it probably checked
checked everybody else up so
anyway
yeah on that note
um oh cosy you go next
yeah i just wanted to talk about um
something that sama said um you know i
saw your face during that meeting i just
wanted to point out the collective look
that black people can give each other
and just instantly know because that's
my favorite form
that's my favorite type of formation of
a community to be honest to be honest in
all seriousness

you know i love being in a space with my sister because even if we're on a zoo meeting i can just look down at her little square and know exactly what she's thinking um

with the two black female friends that i have we can just look at each other in a room um in a class when we know that there's something going on that someone is saying that we're like you know has to [__] our head you know open our eye just a tad bit

just to recognize i see you i understand that this is not something that is right and is justified but i'm here and i am sending you brain waves in solidarity

i don't know whether i mean the fee like it's so true everything you're saying is
so true and i don't know whether to be
genuinely happy or genuinely sad that
that is i'm right in the middle right
like
but i want to keep it positive i don't
want to keep it negative this event is
positivity
um
and we've already kind of been speaking
about this
thus far but the third question um
that we have for tonight
is how do we find rich spaces to grow
in our black feminism in our homes our
communities
and in our relationship with ourselves
and i really um
i really think about
both community and then self you know
sometimes
it's really hard especially with
everything that's happening in the world
um
to be okay right and sometimes it's it's
so it's okay to not be okay
but how do we
again find joy find
find people right who can help remind us
that
there's always
some
maybe it's through spirituality there's
always some beacon of light peace of
hope um
when we come together
that can
[Music]
maybe not
like fix but alleviate a lot of a lot of
the
tensions and
difficulties we experience
um
and so
i don't know if anyone
feels
called to respond i know dr banks and
amara you haven't gotten to talk about
community yet so
i can go ahead with that one um
i actually
had sort of a
interesting experience thinking about
this as we were preparing for the
evening
that
in my mind i'm sort of at a place
sort of what i talked about before where
i
see myself as having a unique
perspective
um where i have the opportunity to pour
into other people
um and sort of sprinkle the black girl
magic right
um
but in a way
that
helps sort of decolonize
one happy experience at a time
so i think that um and we sort of talked
about this during my podcast episode
that there's a lot of
things in the world that try to rope
black women into
co-signing on
[Music]
colonizer behavior
where it's like
it would be easier for me
if
so from the perspective of the the
spoken word piece that i presented um
it's a conversation between a black man
and a black woman
as a black man
you know they go through these
experiences where it's like i'm sort of
halfway to white manhood
and so
i need to be able to control things or i
need to be able to
get to this level of success that has been dangled in front of me and the best way that i can do that is to control you so like help me feel empowered by co-signing on this colonizer behavior right or it would make everybody feel better if you could just straighten your hair it would be better or make everybody feel more comfortable if you didn't speak so directly right these kinds of things um and so within the information that's being communicated through these microaggressions it's like who you are is not okay what you're doing is not okay and not only that but it is your responsibility to make me comfortable
the way that i want you to make me comfortable even if it puts you out of sorts um which i obviously completely reject
right and so not only just for me to be able to resist those things and say no you can take me as i am or you can walk but also you know to build environments or put forth this energy and this thought that that colonial mindset was never the jam and so we need to deconstruct that sort of one piece at a time so whether it's in the way that i choose to manage the students that work in my lab and treat them as humans and show my colleagues that that's an
appropriate and sustainable way to
manage a staff
and that you still get really good
results and publish high end papers and
all of these kinds of things by being
dee to people and feeding them pound
cake occasionally
um you know i i think that's
the best way that i can sort of push
this idea
that we don't have to be
so competitive we don't have to have
this idea
that being successful means that i'm
stepping on other people
which i think is a lot you know that has
been born out of this colonial mindset
and so for me sprinkling the black girl
magic is just sort of deconstructing
that
and in the spaces where i have the
agency to do it
make sure that i'm presenting this
alternative way of being

so that people hopefully will catch on
to that and say ah i don't have to be
mean to people or talk down to them
you know in order for them to
produce what i need them to produce it's
a whole different way of thinking about
this
that's more productive and it doesn't
tear people down
and i think that's you know sort of the
the better way to do it but to just
live it out
so that you know that's my way of um
bringing it to the world
lori what i hear you talking about
there's is the both and
i hear you talking about the the
critique critiquing
colonization critiquing and colonization
of the mind
you know uh
this and what other folks have talked
about the imposition of these norms and standards based on a white heterosexual middle-class male ideal and so so so making sense of how that imposes certain things on all of us and at the same time responding in a way that says here's my innovation here's my creativity here's my black girl magic it's it's the both and that i think is really powerful i think it it offers something that we don't often see and we don't see enough of in the world um and i think black feminism is a is a
is a source for that um both the individual claiming of self and doing what you need to do what i need to do to be well and active and on the other hand providing a touchstone for the vision you want to create of a different world and a different way to be in it [Music] and i think an instrumental part of that too of being able to sprinkle black girl magic is also to i'm thinking of like almost tinker bell but there was actually a black tinker bell now that i think about it but i from when my sister was younger and the fact that i don't know her name bothers me um but it's it's transforming people into black girl one word i'm thinking of um
robin boileron who we've been reading um
in this black feminist class
um
of
creating black girl allies and what does
it mean to
be
i think it takes more than allyship i
think it takes a sense of love and being
a stake
holder that sounds very capitalist i'm
sorry being being connected
to
the prosperity the joy of black women
and girls right
brittany cooper defines black feminism
as her love of black women and girls
period
that's that's all
that it really is um in her perspective
and i i completely agree
um
and there's a question in there
somewhere i'm so sorry and my dog's also running around eating photographs
so i'm in a bit of a pickle
if someone can extract a question from what i was just saying that would be wonderful
i don't know a question oh wait let me see it was someone else about it amara were you like trying to come off me okay go ahead go ahead iridessa that's her name thank you it was cool it was a cosy or amara cozy thank you i i looked at cozy um i appreciated iridessa i appreciated aisha from winx club um all of the black movie characters all the black girl movie characters and tv show characters um i just want to say had a profound impact on me personally because i never saw that um as the
protagonist um
so yeah black finger bell and all of
them i also
i also thank them for my origin story i
guess
um
so to
to kind of go back to the question um
of finding rich spaces in
community
i
i recently had the opportunity to um
hear dr ianna elizabeth johnson speak
and i i asked her a question uh that it
was not anything related to her work but
really about her experience as a black
woman in academia in science and in
policy spaces
about how her identity has influenced um
the the way that she's moved through
these spaces um and i guess the the
communities that she's in
uh who don't necessarily embody or
represent the mixture of identities that she does
and she responded to me that it was not the response i was expecting nor was it the response that i hoped for
um that sometimes one just really needs to play the game and um it is unfortunate that that is true
um and i thought about it for a long while i actually um i was supposed to be doing some work um because the panel was in the evening and i i just just kept thinking about it about playing the game um not necessarily conforming but also um being wary and like recognizing and maybe um [Music]
laughing at a joke that you didn't think is so funny was the example that she gave uh things of that sort um and i thought about it for a while um and i i also recognize my personal experiences of really being in spaces where i was the only one who held the mixture of identities that i did being in communities that i was the only black woman and feeling uncomfortable in that but continuing to play the game nonetheless and i think my primary motivator for playing the game um is is hope is the hope that through my presence and my existence that other young black girls might be able to find those spaces and might be able to seek their passions and maybe an avenue
that they were not ever expecting or intending to and that when it comes to who they see that maybe i am one of those spaces that they see and we can kind of build a community in ourselves i think that this is this this for me is is something that's really important um i'm really grateful for the work that i do that i direct our youth engagement and i have an incredible um young black girl um who's one of the fellows for our youth network and she is so so awesome and she is absolutely incredible and anytime we're on a call together provides me with so much hope um and i
am the only i used to i want to say i am
but i'm not anymore this it's the thing
i was the only person who held my
mixture of identities in the work that i
did and now i'm not and that feels so
great and that is so inspirational and
it's so hopeful to me
um
and
if i hadn't i guess played the game in a
sense
and i wouldn't have that connection um
so
although
although i don't
i think playing the game is hard playing
the game is difficult but i think it's
sometimes it is necessary um it is it's
living in that uncomfortability of okay
i am the only person i recognize that
that is not um that's nothing that i
will change who i am i will still be
unapologetically myself but i am
recognizing that um
it is me who is here but also it is the
hope and the opportunity that your face
and having other folks see you maybe who
again
didn't
expect themselves to be in that avenue
or that area
that you can really find community with
each other um and build a larger
community with yourselves as well
oh mara to be
a black woman and a trailblazer in any
kind of field is like a
i just
um
my heart is just falling for you because
um
it is such a
a mixed burden and a blessing
as you just articulated
um and i think that i you know
i recently i recently um
came to know not personally just like like to know she existed and i've heard her do some talks this this large carnivore um ecologist um her name is dr ray wynne grant and she like and she's like amazing and i don't know of any like so she deals with large animals like bears and things and i think that um i mean my time has passed but if if i were i mean i'm 45 i'm not going to become a large carnivore ecologist but if i were like a young person and i was able to see someone like her or someone like you i just it would have um maybe would have made my like my science-heavy past stick in a different kind of way i was pre-med for
a long time i don't know maybe it would have made it stick in a d in some kind of way and i just i am so grateful that you are in the positions you're in that you're in in places that you know in the spaces that you are occupying um and just think about all the people you are bringing with you who aren't who you know some of them are present like this young person but then some of them aren't aren't aren't there yet but you're like you're just you're making so much space for them and that is beautiful and so thank you for that i have to say as you were talking about playing the game i my critical black memory which is a term that i encourage everyone to look up because i think it's the coolest thing ever and i talk about it all the time
now
um went to several spaces so one is the actual action of pressing play on a song by the game which again or like 90s mid-2000s reference he's a rapper um his claim to fame is how we do and it's the soundtrack that's going on in the back of my head as i think about how instrumental it is to play the game to change it for the next generation and that's really what all the generations before us have been doing they have been playing the game and they have been slowly changing it and we benefit from their work and we have to now work ourselves to continue this change to push towards equity equality
liberation
and i also wanted to
i'm just reading my notes i'm so sorry i
want to also mention the fact that it's
so important that we can bring our whole
selves into spaces right
to be a scientist or a doctor
it does not
box you in this one
type of being and thinking and knowing
you bring your book your black feminism
like the bag that you carry into the
supermarket
you know with you because now no plastic
bags in maine which should be everywhere
um
you bring that with you into every space
and you cannot just bring it but you can
show it off
you can have those multiplicities be
acknowledged appreciated recognized
and lead
the field that you're in into its next iteration and dimension

yeah i just i felt really called to say that just because i i want this conversation to never end selfishly but every people have kids i have a dog a hot dog dog who's destroying my house um

oh oh you're not you go you go sama i just wanna um so i just wanna also say like there's a there's another piece of this in terms of thinking about black feminism how it can nurture community and nurture ourselves that i just want to make sure we that is out there because you know while we are talking about how potent our black girl magic is recognizing we live in a very very white state and there are very you know there
are very few black people very few black women and uh tokenization is real and we very quickly all can get very very exhausted right i mean if you're not in maine you're in new england it is exhausting um because you know um you know amara knows this just i'm a person who likes the outdoors um i i am a volunteer leader for an organization called outdoor afro i am not someone who does anything around climate crisis the climate crisis then you know uh environmental justice not really that's like not like i'm still learning but i don't know how many people see me see that i do outdoors things and they're like please come talk to us about
76:14 uh environmental justice always and i
76:16 always though do you know amara i didn't
76:18 know cosi but now i know cozy so i don't
76:20 say do you know omar do you know cosi
76:23 so the second that they see any of us
76:25 and see like oh wow they are articulate
76:28 they can speak some words
76:30 they want us to be on things and so the
76:32 impulse to there is a
76:35 um i sometimes have this i'm speak for
76:37 myself i guess i have sometimes have
76:39 this
76:40 past smack had this very strong impulse
76:43 to be like this is
76:45 this
76:46 this i have to correct this thing that's
76:49 happening i have to
76:51 and i would and i that's what i would do
76:53 i would step into places and do you know
76:55 whatever i guess sprinkle the black girl
76:56 magic but
76:57 that is
76:59 exhausting and so
the other thing that I think that black feminism can teach us is about rest and is about caring for ourselves because that is also revolutionary and about saying no and deciding deciding what spaces you're going to put yourself in and what spaces you just you don't have to so I mean I know Mario you're talking about playing the game I hope that some point um I'm not 50 yet but I do like whoever said that when you're 50 you can just stop caring about things I'm not 50 yet but I do feel like I can I hope I i hope I feel like I care less than I used to about playing the game I hope um I want to read a quote from um I think I brought this up in our in our little in our podcast Lauren um
um alexis pauline gums wrote this beautiful book called undrowned black feminist lessons from marine mammals it is and it's in very short digestible vignettes um and it's really beautiful and she i have this quote and i write poetry and i took this quote um from this book that she wrote and i um use it as like the introduction to a poem made up of different haikus that i wrote and she writes quote and what a celebration and what a celebration when we realize that our survival need not make us into monsters and um you can interpret that quote any all sorts of different ways because there are words
that are on a page and they're up to our interpretation but i like to think about that as like as like the sweetness that we all need and that we all deserve um because of all the things that we have experienced being black women and being in high demand when things go awry and maybe you can fix it um so i just want to advocate like rest relaxation finding i i you know um regrounding all of those things that's to me that's also black feminism has also taught me that yeah just speaking about teachings um being the youngest on the panel i'm just able to see you know myself in all of you and just hoping to be
you know just as powerful and just
so able to be so comfortable with
yourself
you know i want to see myself i want to
be that way when i'm at all of your
stages of life because i'm still only
17. um
especially as
you know you all talk about your
experiences in higher education
as i am starting to
you know come into a little bit of
contact with because i'm starting to
apply to colleges right now as a senior
i'm tired already and
and i've barely gotten any um any
college decisions yet and so
just being able to see how you all
navigate
this
junk level world called academia is just
so incredible to me and i just
admire all of your contributions to the game and um making the game a lot more tolerable so young black people like me are able to step foot in these spaces and feel seen and feel heard and feel like i'm able to actually make it so thank you oh my goodness i was like when is the waterworks it's gonna come right now that's when they're coming oh my goodness i i just echo that i'm literally only two years older than my sister well two years and seven months um and so um i am excited for next week i'm stuck i'm stepping into my um second decade of life
I'm so excited um especially with this conversation um because i've i'm really proud of the personal growth that i've made um and the recognition of my value and my worth um and not discounting it and having heard from all of your perspectives and your experiences i'm so incredibly excited to take that insight um into my my second decade of life and to learn with that and to grow with that so i thank you all so much for your vulnerability offering up your story so that i may learn from them and again as josie said making this this walk a little bit easier for the generation behind you.
thank you amara
leslie did you wanna
yeah um
the
i'm just
full right now
because of so many things that you all
have been talking about i want to
pull a couple of threads and one begins
with the conversation that all of us
have been having about
self-care the importance of self-care
and the ways in which
black feminism orients us to take care
of ourselves
and i have to ask the question for what
um
and i
my own riff on that
is not
not only for our survival not only for
our own
to nurture our own creativity
and innovation
but also to envision a different world
cosi you talked about entering the
academy and
and
you know
being concerned about whether or not you
could survive and finding the
touchstones that will help you do that i
will also say
that
by doing that
you also
can make a mark on that place you have a
right
to make a mark on that place to help
whatever place you choose to go to
imagine differently how it can be
and so as somebody who's got a couple of
decades on you
i would simply say
and to all of you because lori talked
about the ways in which she does it in
her lab and i know in other spaces as well just just to leave your mark to claim that and to say people there's a different way to be in the world out of black feminism we draw the strength to be able to put something new in the world to put something more productive more generative more positive into the world so be aware of that claim it and do it honey it's so true you're so right and we do it knowing that we are connected to one another and to all of the black feminists that come before us that's why we do it you know i don't know if i don't want to like abruptly just go into concluding remarks
i know if anybody else wants to say anything before we have to go okay well i'm deeply grateful to all of you women here tonight esteemed panelists who i have the privilege of calling my friends now i hope that's okay we could talk about that offline i'm i'm sure we're we're all friends if not closer at some point um i want to thank my incredible co-instructors uh liliana and kevin for being instrumental in making this event happen and believing in me as like a personal side note thank you to the ham campus activity fund for sponsoring this event it really
means the world
to really i think every single student of color if i can speak for them in this moment that a program like this can exist at umaine at this time i want to thank the umaine alumni association for hosting the webinar tonight and finally thank you to the viewers of this event for your compassionate listening i hope that you have a safe and healthy holiday season okay good night everyone