

Integrative Project II

Redefining Wellness & Liberation Within the Black Community

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Introduction

In order for the Black community to experience a sustainable model of wellness and liberation, the Black community needs safe spaces and whole systems. Due to the extensive history of systemic racism and oppression amongst Black people, the lack of affordable and sustainable resources for our community along with the need for immense amounts of generational healing, it is pivotal that spaces and systems are cultivated for Black communities across the nation to thrive.

The Black power and Black liberation movement has been a staple in Black American history since the early 1960's and 70's. This movement was a social and political movement led by Black advocates and allies who believed in radical self-love, radical Black pride, self-sufficiency, and equality for all Black people and those of African descent.

Due to the constant injustices Black Americans were facing, various spaces, systems, and organizations were cultivated. Organizations such as, The Nation of Islam, the Black Panther Party, the Black Womens United Front and many more bloomed due to the need to fight for basic civil rights, liberation, freedom, safety, and equality for all Black people and those of African descent. These Black organizations not only fought for their basic human rights, while the American system around them failed, they took upon themselves to house, teach, feed, and keep their communities safe.

Being that Black folks have experienced generations of trauma from the moment Black people became enslaved and brought to America, the wounds, cycles, and affects of it don't simply disappear. Seth Holmes, author of 'Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies' writes, "In order to work

to consciously bring about the amelioration of social suffering, people must first be aware of the inequalities that cause suffering” (Holmes 161). We’re aware of the inequalities, we’re aware of the suffering, but what is next? Hannah Wilson, shared with me, “We as Black people can’t make any major shifts or moves we would like to make because of the embedded trauma our people have faced” (Hannah J. Wilson). That trauma Hannah is mentioning is still with us today and continues to manifest in various forms. As the Black community continues to strive and thrive for ourselves and for our ancestry, there needs to be both acknowledgement as Holmes and Hannah stated, while also tending to the wounding that has and continues to take place.

Contextualization

After weeks of deciphering, I decided my conclusive research question to be: How does the Black community begin to define for themselves and act upon both Black wellness and Black liberation through a horticultural, ancestral and spiritual lense? While I studied, held conversations, and created spaces for community to gather, I learned the physical, ancestral, and generational benefits of being in a horticultural environment along with how simply seeking out community can assist in healing aspects of the mind, body, Spirit and one's overall wellness. So, what is needed in order to make this wellness, liberation, and healing a reality?

LeConté J Dill brought me into understanding how Spirituality can start the journey of further healing communities of color, specifically the Black community and Black youth especially. Dill acknowledges the growing interest in the public health field regarding the benefits of spirituality on health and well-being. Dill then brought my attention to the concept of “Spiritual coping”, which refers to a resilience of spiritual beliefs and teachings in times of hardship and in managing life events.

Before continuing, I would like to address that religion and Spirituality might seem synonymous, but they are different in that, “Religion is often defined as the relationship that members of a culture have with their deity(ies) through formalized institutions” (Constantine). Whereas, “Spirituality may represent one way through which some people combine beliefs about a transcendental reality into their worldviews and self conceptions” (Constantine).

Dill then goes on to state, “The acknowledgement of one’s spiritual self has served as the very foundation of African American life (Dantley, 2003). W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) suggested that Black people’s beings were tied to their souls and spirits. He goes on to conceptualize the “spiritual striving” (Du Bois, 1903) among Black people— their holistic efforts to become more kind and loving in relation to themselves and to others (Dillard, 2006). African American religiosity and spirituality have been historically grounded in the quest for liberation from oppression. (697)” As Dill carries out his research in East Oakland, a place where Black community members often experience chronic poverty, neighborhood disadvantage, health issues, and racial injustice, he speaks with various members within the community, Black youth specifically and comes to an understanding that during times of struggle and hardship most African American community members reported spiritual coping behaviors such as praying to God or a Divine Source or leaning on God for support, strength, and guidance.

Another avenue of acting upon healing, liberation, and wellness within the Black community are “healing circles”. Healing circles are indigenous to the Native Indigenous people whose land we now call the United States. Healing circles are also called talking circles or sharing circles. The main essence of these circles is a way of providing group support for people who are navigating things such as trauma, violence, grief or addictions. Within some

healing circles, there are some ground rules laid out such as, not interrupting one another and keeping an open mind to name a few. Within other healing circles there might be a talking piece, meaning whoever is holding on to that talking piece has the floor and should be the only one talking at the time. Folks usually sit in a circle and there almost always is a facilitator.

Something that I've learned within my research is not only how healing these circles can be for a collective of people but, they also hold joy and pain through the art of storytelling, sharing, and wisdom. In *Creative Arts and the Indigenous Healing Circle Within an Indigenous Context*, author Honoré France describes storytelling as medicine. France states, "One goal of this Indigenous story was to ensure that knowledge did not get separated from experience, or wisdom from divinity, elders stressed listening, watching and waiting, not asking why. (France)" This particularly stood out to me because as Black people navigating through life's joy and trauma, the experience and the knowledge gained should be honored just as much as the emotional toll or rollercoaster that experience gives you. I also believe when you have multiple generations sitting in a circle and one person talking, it gives the opportunity to listen and digest information in opposition to saying the first thing that comes to your mind when you either agree or disagree with what's being presented and not asking "why".

Healing circles can be implemented within the Black community to navigate trauma, cultivating community ideas to pursue wellness, and to bring together generations of stories and experiences to gain a better understanding of one another's lived experience.

Wellness and liberation within the Black community also should involve mutual aid. Foundation Beyond Belief is a humanitarian organization whose mission is, "to seek to end poverty and hunger, promote good health and wellbeing, foster employment opportunities and

economic growth in ways that exemplify humanist values” (Foundation Beyond Belief). Their values include respect and compassion for all human beings, reducing suffering and inequalities within communities, engaging in community-led solutions, and preserving and protecting the well-being of all life. As I’ve learned from the efforts of Foundation Beyond Belief and gained knowledge through the consistency of this organization holding community events, I’ve discovered two areas that keep this mission afloat. Grants and volunteers. By gathering funds for these community gathering events and by having people showing up, cultivates a rippled effect of mutual aid resources such as shared knowledge, job opportunities, community building, food, and shelter being shared amongst the community. Similar to Foundation Beyond Belief, YesFarm has a similar model, mission, and values that is centered towards equitable food access, while still having and bringing in various different mutual-aid resources.

Seth Holmes, author of “Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies” writes, “In order to work to consciously bring about the amelioration of social suffering, people must first be aware of the inequalities that cause suffering” (Holmes 161). By acknowledging the inequities the Black community has faced we can take another step towards the solution towards wellness, liberation, and healing.

Qualitative Inquiry

Key values within qualitative research that have assisted and allowed me to further digest the research I was seeking is recognizing pauses and tones. As I conducted interviews and observed community members at YesFarm and how they interacted with one another, I realized I was taking a very rigid approach within the first few interviews I conducted. Within my first two interviews I remember reflecting and taking a pause because something felt off. I noticed the

feelings of ingenuity coming from myself, the interviews always falling under thirty minutes, although I had at least 8 to 10 questions, people weren't very expressive with their answers to my questions, and there were so many pauses and moments of silence as I would move through the questions.

I wrote in a forum discussion on May 5th, 2021 "A challenge that keeps coming up for me is deciding how I would like to go about this research, since it intertwines with spirituality and wellness, two states of being you cannot measure simply by observing in one sitting or even a one time conversation in my opinion" (Yeawa Asabi). I knew it felt bizarre asking about these very real questions surrounding such an intimate part of one's life. Asking about one's spirituality and attempting to define wellness in an "interview" style felt somewhat mundane. Although I recognize Merriam & Tisdell advice, "...the spontaneous exchange of interviews in everyday conversations," a research interview "is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose" (Merriam & Tisdell 107).

As I sat in my frustration, I turned to Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research* and I learned how to identify unity and tension. I felt a breeze of reassurance that I knew I was able to pinpoint where my tension was within these first few interviews and I had to center myself enough to bring unity to my navigation on how I will pivot these interviews to feel more natural and conversational.

Thus, I went back to what I learned when I first started the ICD program which is asking myself what my "why" is. I remembered that I'm a human having another conversation with a human about the beautiful complexities of our lives and my research's purpose is to allow those beautiful mysteries and complexities to unfold within conversation. As I allowed myself to sit

with the essence of these conversations being Spiritual, and trusted that the conversation will flow, I continued to remind myself that these “interviews” are simply heart to heart conversations.

The Qualitative approach is distinctive because it takes us away from data in forms of numbers and tallies. It allows us to seek research connections and can have a long lasting impact on the individual outside of simply researching a project. As we community developers navigate the world, it is part of our duty to continue to learn the communities we wish to serve and those outside of our scope so we can better serve, love, respect, and understand the community at large, the world. The qualitative approach allows us to be better equipped to serve the communities we wish to serve through our observations, conversations, and community building.

In future, as my interest grows within learning about the multilayered solutions to navigating wellness and liberation within the Black community, along with continuing the conversation in understanding what this means for Black folks, I will remember that conversations build community and common understanding amongst people and cultures. I imagine that as I build out future programming and possibly organizations, I will change my outcome to be less about finding a solution but instead cultivating an understanding surrounding the power of intimate conversations and the needs of the community I wish to serve.

As I continue to learn from this project, I can utilize qualitative and quantitative methods to measure the impact of a project through finding ways to stay curious about my proposed statement or hypothesis. Early in the ICD program, I remember professors often telling me to ask questions about my questions. As I went through the first portion of my research, I remember leaving interviews and later transcribing them, pondering what people might have meant, is there

a deepening meaning to what they might have said that I'm not catching or having a general curiosity about statements people have made. For example, I interviewed Efiya, founder of Iyoba Body Essentials, mother, and lifecoach and she stated in our interview, "This is what I know. Human beings are born free. At my essence and core I'm always free. If I think I'm not, then I'm not. I define freedom as a state of mind" (Efiya 2021). This answer came after asking her how she defines liberation and wellness. As I transcribed I thought, how did she achieve this understanding? Is it something she was born knowing? Was there a prayer or mantra that reminded her of this? How does she practice this? These are questions that would have better helped me understand and learn from Efiya not only in the essence of understanding my thesis topic better, but understand how the Black individuals got to their personal understanding of wellness and liberation.

Community developers should include qualitative elements in the effectiveness of their evaluations because you're taking the time to intentionally listen, learn, and cultivate the necessary changes that need to be made. Qualitative elements allow stories to be told. In the case of my project, qualitative research is pivotal because I've been researching a topic that has certain components that have yet to be heavily researched such as spirituality, while also gaining stories and insight from a historically marginalized and often overlooked people group, the Black community. Similar to how we attempt to balance our qualitative research, Nate, community member and YesFarm volunteer taught me that, "Wellness is not a, physical, mental and spiritual separated, but the challenge is balancing the three" (Nate 2021). It feels like qualitative research is also teaching me the balance of listening, learning, and speaking when necessary.

Qualitative approaches to inquiry will continue to make me a more impact agent of social change because it allows my education and knowledge to also be a form of freedom and expression. It will allow me to continue to have conversations that build long lasting relationships and continue to challenge my intentional listening skills. Qualitative approaches will continue to keep me curious about the people I'm having conversations with along with the research I'm researching to cultivate better solutions. The qualitative allows storytelling to be highlighted and those stories have the potential to be told numerous times and have the potential to impact another individual either within or outside of a community.

ICD Values

Throughout the entirety of my time within the International Community Development program, I've enjoyed learning about the content within the program but, I truly enjoyed learning more about myself. Within my personal transformation, I've realized I have a love for learning. The learning that I've experienced didn't necessarily always come from textbooks or writing and reflecting on a paper, but everywhere I turned. Entering this program, I knew I was a very Spiritual person, someone who saw lessons and blessings in anything and everything I came across, along with seeing the love and duality within' all things. But, the process of having to research a topic that felt so unresearchable at times, and often feeling like this research project was a missing puzzle piece to my joy, taught me the undeniable love I have of learning about the beautiful complexities of life. Mo, an interviewee from YesFarm also shared some words of wisdom with me to summarize what I'm expressing, "We have to be able and allow ourselves to be complex, there is no room for 'you' when you center perfection" (Mo).

Parker J Palmer reminded me throughout this adventure, "It is a strange gift, this birthright gift of self." As I continue to advocate for sacred horticultural spaces for the Black community, and nurture the mission of the Black community unlocking their spiritual abundance which I deem to be our birthright, Palmer reminded me that it too is my birthright to learn how to be comfortable within my gift of self. There is so much freedom, fluidity, and flux in this gift of life, and with the ICD program I've learned to go with the push and pull of life. I've also learned to be a lot less hard on myself as I am navigating, learning, and unlearning constantly. But, I've found freedom and peace within that. Trinity, a volunteer at YesFarm taught me, "Freedom is a practice, it isn't something that's easy or given. It is something you have to practice and work at" (Trinity 2021). I often found myself finding moments of freedom within my research when I made a choice to allow myself to flow with the project, instead of attempting to make it all make sense overnight, have it sound right, or look a certain way that wasn't true to me.

I truly believe it is the birthright of all Black people to embody that flux and to continue to be the change that our ancestors, future generations, and current selves wish to see in the world.

Copowerment is a dynamic of mutual exchange through which both sides of a social equation are made stronger and more effective by the other. Copowerment is not empowerment, where empowerment has an essence of hierarchical stature to it. Copowerment is a two way dynamic about two sides coming together and working together. Copowerment is something I saw throughout the entirety of my research. I recognized the power of mutual aid and the power of people power. Palmer, author of 'Contradiction, Paradox, & the Life of the Spirit' writes, "Mutual Aid organizations and nonprofits have filled a lot of the holes our government refuses to

directly address the social and economic injustice happening in our world today.” The concept of copowerment and organizations providing for their communities is a concept that was heavily used within the Black power and liberation movement as well. Hence, drawing on the importance of honoring and appreciating history along with the ancestral wisdom that has laid down the groundwork and that we can continue to learn and draw from. Copowerment is also reflected within the defining liberation and wellness because it builds a sense of trust in our present and our future. I recall reading early in my research , from ‘Foundation Beyond Belief’, “When we see one another providing for one another and going out of our way to make sure everyone in the community is being taken care of, it begins to build trust, a bit of comfort, and hope for the future.” I would also argue that this is a key mission within copowerment is building a foundational trust built out of brick, something that is sturdy. It gives not a sense of hope, which I believe at times can be wishful thinking, but a bright beam of light called faith, which is ongoing and can be everlasting.

As my philosophy has expanded and when I think about the work I wish to do in the future, I have appreciated what higher education has done for me but, truth is I just want own a few acres of farmland and share whatever resources, knowledge, and abundance I’ve gained thus far with my loved ones and community members. I’ve appreciated being challenged in trying to capture the essence of spirituality, wellness, and liberation, but I believe those words need to become more action oriented for myself. I believe this project has opened my eyes to a wider understanding of people, vulnerability, trust, intimacy and love, but it also revealed to me that I don’t really enjoy studying wellness, liberation, and spirituality. I believe these topics are so sacred, intimate, and vulnerable that they should be kept sacred to those experiencing those

moments, while also inviting more people to indulge in these experiences. Marcus from Black Star Farmers, a farming collective in Seattle told me, “Wellness is a lot of time spent staying true to one self and feeling good about your decision in life, reflecting on the ones you’ve felt forced to make, and your own personal alignment. Wellness is an inner understanding self and an aligned self” (Marcus 2021).

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Integrative Project I

Redefining Wellness & Liberation Within the Black Community

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Author Note

This research and piece of writing is dedicated to my ancestors who have been doing this work long before I came to be. I give thanks for their abundant wisdom, love, and for choosing to walk beside me.

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Introduction

May 2021 through August 2021, I had the privilege to begin a journey that shifted the way I view myself, the world around me, and the future of Black and Brown wellness and liberation. On May 29th 2021, I began my research at Yes Farm in Seattle Washington, A Black-led 1.5 acre farm in the middle of the Yesler Terrace community cultivated to serve the local BIPOC community through growing and providing fresh fruits and vegetables at no cost. The sweaty, pollen-filled, tiresome weekends turned into what felt like a daily transformative sacred bond, whose intention and sole purpose was to deepen my connection to the earth and my own Spirit. As I was filled with realizations of self and experiencing a constant sense of content and joy, I realized my purpose was clear in questioning the barriers that keep the Black community from experiencing this type of connection with self and with the earth.

As I began stirring up conversations surrounding belonging, intersectionalities of Blackness, and really driving the dagger within understanding what Black people meant by having a 'safe space', the conversation quickly turned into acknowledging and understanding that colonization and our Westernized and capitalistic conditioning has Black folks further away from the Truth of our people are and who we were before colonization. While going through the interview process, I also asked Black folks, "What does wellness mean to you and how would you define it?" "What are some key things that allow your body and Spirit to feel safe?" And my personal favorite, "What is something you love about being Black?"

After a full semester of casual conversations, interviews, ethnographies, reflecting upon my own experience and the experiences of the other Black folks, I have come to find that the

Black community needs and deserves an immense amount of healing. But, what does that “healing” look like? This truth came from a local Seattle farmer, Hannah Wilson, who brought me to this conclusion by stating, “We as Black people can’t make any major shifts or moves we would like to make because of the embedded trauma our people have faced” (Hannah J. Wilson). Some of those shifts include having our own land, our own doctors that can give us accurate information on biological make-up, and basic necessities such as having organic and nutritious foods being put into our bodies and communities, just to name a few.

My question is what do we need to understand about the history of Black community, our trauma, and questioning how do we begin this healing process and what does that look like? My statement and conclusion continues to stand. Our healing starts with acknowledging the conditioning of our people, addressing the Westernized illusion of what has been perceived to be wellness and liberation, and creating our own narrative and redefining what those words mean within the Black community.

By directly addressing the needs of the Black community and creating effective safe spaces the Black community can pursue, further, and act upon our definitions of wellness and liberation. Through undoing the conditioning of the Black communities mind of the Westernized, colonial, and capitalistic approach and teaching in surrounding wellness and liberation, we strengthen our foundation in centering our culture, resources, opportunities, and community.

Research & Research Methodology

As I ventured deeper into my research journey and continuous conversations surrounding wellness and liberation for Black folks, I thought to myself, what do we need to make this happen based off of the needs of safety, resources, culture, and community being expressed in this moment. What can we put into motion by 2022? Based on the data I collected, Black people need a safe space first and foremost so how do we go about finding that space. Since YesFarm is central within the Yesler Terrace community, the goal is to find a space within that radius. A few options were pitched to the table. We can find a grant that funds this “community mental health co-op” and fund a space that way, we ask to receive donations from the community to raise funds to rent a space within 15-20 mile radius of YesFarm, or we can collaborate with an organization that has a similar mission and values surrounding food sovereignty, mental health, and Black wellness and liberation. After collaborating on those ideas, YesFarm landed a few different organizations that could make this idea tangible. Organizations such as Y-WE (Young Women Empowered), AfricaTown in the Central District, and several community centers within the Yesler Terrace and Central district area are all possible future collaborations to cultivate this space with, especially because these organizations already have a following of the Black community. This would be the first few steps in cultivating wellness and liberation for Black folks in the community to come, share, space, and as we build, seek the healing that is their birthright.

When thinking about research methods through this process, I landed on Appreciative Inquiry (AI) by Sue Annis Hammond for the majority of the project. “The major assumption of

AI is that in every organization something works and change can be managed through the identification of what works, and the analysis of how to do more of what works” (Hammond). I thought to myself, great! Stick with everything that works within this ideology and within Yes Farm. It was then brought to my attention by Professor Tien that my research is actually challenging and disrupting the thought process of what wellness is and what it can look like as a Black person in America. By holding both research methodologies (AI and Critical Theory) with intention within this process, I learned a pivotal life lesson, being that two things that are polar don't necessarily have to be separate or distant. It is possible, and I would state imperative to be able to see both the appreciation in what Yes Farm has done for the Black community while asking how is our conditioning in Westernized colonialism and beliefs being further conditioned simply by existing within this reality of being Black in America.

Next Steps

Once we figured out what we could do within the next year, we began expanding the vision. Asking questions like, what does this look like within the next 3 to 5 years? After we secure a space, we begin the process of looking at the needs states, safety, resources, community, etc and begin and what resources do we bring in to make that happen. When the Black community talks about safety, safety means a place where Black folks can exist and simply be. This space would have one must, being that this space truly is Black and BIPOC practitioners of all kinds, tutors, teachers, mentors, students, etc. For this space to be a safe space for Black people, it means to cultivate a space that centers our experience, our culture, our Truth, and one another which then, can begin the journey of trust and healing.

With that information comes logistics. We begin the process of searching for Black and BIPOC participating organizations while simultaneously thinking about grants to pay these folks, asking their time commitment, what support they will need (i.e transportation of equipment, water, electricity, wifi), and if they're in alignment with this mission of providing wellness for Black folks for little to no cost. These are conversations we expect to be having and anticipating as the word spreads about what YesFarm is trying to cultivate with and for the community.

Overview of the Process

The main purpose of this project is to meet the needs of the Black community through holding conversations and cultivating a mental health cooperative in partnership with Yes Farm. The purpose of this mental health cooperative is to take the time to tend to and recharge the mental, physical, and Spiritual needs of the Black community and to converse about the prioritization of those needs. As we talk about being in healing spaces such as Yes Farm and as we learn from the shifting of the busy blooming season of summer to the restful slumber of winter --it's only right we follow and flow with the seasons and prioritize rejuvenation, rest, and safety. Through honoring the stillness around us, we turn inward, similarly to the crops around us, as they die off during the summer their seeds spread and retreat underground during winter where they can find safety, time to shift, break through their pods, and grow.

With the same realization of winter being right around the corner, I recognized the next steps is creating an outline surrounding what this conversation could look like and how it is possible to bring this conversation into the upcoming year, and navigating what partnering organizations are on board with the alignment of the idea of a Black mental health co-op, Black

wellness, and Black Liberation. As I was gathering my data to prepare to create this outline for this conversation, I was hit with the understanding that in order for Black folks to truly be liberated and free in every sense of the world, it is important and I would state it to be imperative that we do this for us and by us. That is not to negate support from other organizations that align with our mission, but if we really want to talk about Liberation, we need organizations and partners to understand that Black freedom and Liberation is ours to create, cultivate, and own and within those defining principles, allows us to create with full ownership of our ideas, wisdom, and financial control. While holding that truth at the center of this work, we then created an outline and will be presenting it to Yes Farm in the coming months.

1. Hold space for Black community members to address their needs mentally, physically and Spiritually.

- a.) While knowing during the off season (Winter season) Yes Farm has less volunteers there are a few other ways we can gather feedback. Having a station during volunteer farm days where you can write in personal or community needs, having a laminated QR code at the farm that leads to a questionnaire, engaging through Instagram (taking polls, posing questions on story, linking to questionnaire) and through traditional conversation. I would prefer this process to take a while because I want to create opportunities for it to be possible for everyone who would like to speak, can speak and be listened to and heard. Although some may state we cannot address everyone's needs, I believe it is pivotal to speak, listen, and converse, as it is essential to our healing moving forward.

2. Find a space or space(s) to have these “events”

- a.) Asking community members for suggestions of space and what would we like to see in those spaces as far accessibility, culture, location (if possible), etc.

- b.) Reaching out to organization(s) and practitioners that are aligned with Yes Farm’s values, cooperative mental health ideologies, and the overall mission of Black liberation. For example, Modest Family Solutions in Everett Washington is an outdoor school that also holds space for Black youth to be exposed to opportunities such as hydroponics, farming, food redistribution and cultivating and presenting Afro-centric curriculum. MFS is one of the only organizations in Washington doing this type of work for the Black community, therefore finding and partnering with these types of organizations to push Black Liberation forward.

3. Gather data community members, interviews during Research, books, and storytelling.

- a.) Shifting through interviews and research notes and pulling out the most commonly stated needs while also building trust and relationship with the community.

- b.) Compare these needs with the needs the community is currently stating.

4. Cultivate a presentation of what the community needs are and present to the community.

- a.) Taking everything we’ve gathered, creating a small team to cultivate a presentation and allowing room for conversation and education.

5. Gather resources and partnerships that meet the current needs of the community.

- a.) Continuing the process of relationship building and spreading word with organizations we wish to bring into the mental cooperative.

b.) Reaching out and touching base with organizations Yes Farm has worked with before to see if they have any interest, resources, tools, funding, or opportunities in what we're building.

c.) Ensure that we are focused on quality not quantity of the work at the moment. By stating that, I mean if the conversation started about massage therapy and suddenly another situation like Covid 19 happens and folks need food, we pivot to food. Being adaptable and responsive to community needs at the moment is indeed an act of radical and anti-capitalistic liberation.

What Now?

Now we have come to one of the main conclusions being that through addressing the needs of the Black community we can power wellness, center our culture and liberation, along with having continuous conversations on what it means to be well and liberated outside of a colonized mindset. We also know what we can do now and we also know what the next steps are. This conclusion leaves us with this question, what is wellness and liberation when we center our needs, our wellness, and our liberation and it starts with acknowledging and counteracting against our conditioning as Black people. Russell Means was an Oglala Lakota activist for his Indigenous community and he talks about the conditioning of Indigenous folks, his tribe specifically, within the United States face and how if you're not willing to begin the process of undoing the conditioning and narratives placed upon us, we will never be free. As I'm reading his article by filmsforaction.org, I'm realizing freedom and liberation starts with your mindset and the rest will follow.

As Black and Indigenous people, it is in our very DNA to continue to work for those who come before us, it is not only our Spiritual connection to the universe, God, Spirit, the world around us, but also it further connects us to one another as human beings. Our freedom and liberation is our history and knowing where we've come from and how long we've been working towards our own freedom. Our freedom and liberation is retelling the narrative of our people. We weren't only slaves or ensnaked. Black people had entire systems, empires, royalty, and so much more before the White lens attempted to try to extract our truth from us and create an illusion of truth and knowledge about ourselves.

Wellness and liberation isn't a math equation in order to get the perfect answer. For Black people, our wellness and liberation is our truth, livelihood, and overall healthy existence is birthright and we should begin to own it as such. Our existence itself is multilayered, beautifully complex, and exists on various different energies and vibrations. This is a multilayered issue that needs a multilayered solution. When it comes to prioritizing our mental health, food access, and Spiritual wellbeing, we need spaces that are Afro-centric and for us by us and whomever is down for the mission in order to create the shift that is so necessary.

To tie it all together, Black folks have been forced to participate in failing systems, teachings, and narratives that were placed upon us. To bring us closer to liberation and freedom, we need to own and or cultivate our stories, healing, medicine, food, opportunities, resources, and access for ourselves first, and then to all people's. By directly addressing the needs of the Black community and creating effective safe spaces the Black community can pursue, further, and act upon our definitions of wellness and liberation. Through undoing the conditioning of the Black communities mind of the Westernized, colonial, and capitalistic approach and teaching in

surrounding wellness and liberation, we strengthen our foundation in centering our culture, resources, opportunities, and community. We have nothing to lose but our chains.

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