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Nyle Fort Interview

Jennifer Thomson
Bucknell University

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Bucknell: Occupied
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Jennifer Thomson, interviewer (JT)
Nyle Fort, interviewee (NF)

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JT: Good evening and welcome to Bucknell: Occupied here on WVBU Lewisburg. Tonight in the studio I have with me Nyle Fort. He's a Ph.D. student at Princeton, a community organizer, as well as a minister. So welcome to the studio Nyle. Nice to meet you.

NF: Thank you for having me.

JT: So I'd like to start by asking about how you came to be an activist.

JT: Sure. So there's many ways I could tell the story. I'd like to start by saying that I grew up in, originally working class black neighborhood before I moved around a lot to some suburbs. But I always knew I was black but I didn't quite have like the language of institutionalized racism or oppression and things like that. I ended up becoming a minister at a young age which is a longer story that I won't tell here. But at 16 I became a minister and that was really my window into community work. It wasn't quite political yet so I was working with young people. I was preaching a lot. I was doing youth ministry but I wasn't politicized. I ended up going to Morehouse College on a scholarship. And even at Morehouse there were some things happened that I thought laid the groundwork for my later political work. I still didn't see sort of the political light so to speak. So it was actually my first semester in graduate school. I was getting a Master's of Divinity a first semester, first year. I was in a class called systematic theology with a teacher by the name of Mark Taylor and whom I love. Mark Taylor had Mumia Abu-Jamal call into the class. At this time, Mumia Abu-Jamal who was probably arguably the most well-known political prisoner in the world was still on death row. I had never heard about Mumia Abu-Jamal. I knew prisons were filled with black people. But again I didn't have quite like a systemic analysis or anything like that. So long story short Mumia called into the class live from death row, quite literally, and gave one of the most riveting lectures I've ever heard in my life. It was about 15 minutes. One of the first things that I noticed was how much compassion was in his voice and knowing that he was on death row and had been on death row longer than I'd been alive but yet so much compassion can come from him so much intelligence so much imagination. While being confined in that space and under those conditions it just arrested me. Quite literally, I knew that my life would be a bit different. I didn't know it'd be this different, [LAUGHS] so I ended up reading everything about his case. I remember walking outta class and just researching everything about Mumia and telling my friends about Mumia. And two weeks later I

found myself at my first rally. That was December 11, 2011. And it was at that rally that I began to hear the voices of people whom I now not only admire but, but work alongside in certain ways. I was listening to Cornel West and Pam Africa, and Marc Lamont Hill and Johanna Fernandez and revolutionary voices that begin to give me this language.

JT: MmHm.

NF: And then I begin to read everything I could get my hands on that had anything to do with freedom. The Bible at the time seemed to be Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, that's what everybody was reading at least in my circles. So I read *The New Jim Crow* but I didn't stop there. Then I read Angela Davis' *Are Prisons Obsolete*. And then I just kept reading everything I can get my hands on. But I found myself and this is kind of who I am. I'm a very tangible person. So I was taking classes on everything. Anything that had to do with freedom. I was reading all these books with anything that had to do with freedom, but I wanted to touch it. And I wanted it to be tangible so I ended up volunteering at a youth prison in Union County, New Jersey. I was a youth pastor at the time, and I was trying to connect the ministry that I was doing with this sort of newfound political awareness that was... that I was experiencing. And so I was going to the youth prison and I had no idea what I was doing. I just wanted to be around young people who were catching hell.

JT: MmHm.

NF: And so it was doing that and then I began to just sort of experiment with organizing. It was a world that I didn't know existed. So I began to do one on ones, meet people for lunch, talk about freedom, and talk about politics, talk about how we can solve problems in our community. And before I knew it I had graduated from my master's program and then that August Michael Brown was shot and killed by Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. I had friends at this point who were organizers, legit organizers, and some of them had organized a bus ride to Ferguson. I got on that bus because I was young, black, and full of rage, and didn't know what to do with it all. And so I went to Ferguson and it was in Ferguson that I began to sort of deepen and broaden some of my politics, but also my organizing work. And it's been organizing ever since, except now I'm in a Ph.D. program so I'm trying to figure out how to navigate being in the academy, but also being an organizer. I don't have the answers. I think others probably have much more than I am, so I'm leaning on our tradition on the Black Radical Tradition. People like Robin D.G. Kelley, people like Angela Davis, and people like Mark Taylor. Black folk but also other folk who tapped into this this well of black radicalism to figure out how to navigate it. Because the Academy can be so confining, limiting, isolating, and so I'm trying to figure that out now.

JT: Right. And I imagine for many students on campus who who themselves are thinking about these issues, they'd be interested in anything you had to say about how you understand the relationship between you know highly focused academic work which is often very individualizing and community organizing.

NF: Absolutely. One of the things that made it so... that made the academy so unattractive to me was it's sort of isolating conditions. It seems like, you know, to work alone, to write alone, to think alone, was the only game in town. And so I think there's ways to push back. What I try to do is stay in collectives. I try to not only... try to have my own syllabi that sort of parallels the syllabi that the professors give to me. My own kind of curriculum.

JT: Hmm.

NF: And so that's really important to me, because sometimes I feel drained. I feel like I need new life, I feel like I'm not feeding my revolutionary imagination. So when I feel--find myself in that situation, I go on my bookshelf and pull off you know *Live From Death Row* or *Writing on the Wall* from Mumia or Robyn D.G. Kelley's *Freedom Dreams* or you know just tap into that tradition in order to sustain and nourish that imagination which is so much under assault within the academy. I think working in collectives is really important. I think trying to stay connected to community is extremely important. And also who you take community to be, oftentimes on campuses we can easily forget that students are not the only part of the community,

JT: MmHm.

NF: Faculty are not the only part of the community but we have service workers. We have people from the local community who are working on campus who are cleaning up, who are serving meals, who are doing a host of things that can be invisibilized by the everydayness of going to school. And I think by building relationships with those folks and forming solidarities we're talking about student-base organizing is really important. Reimagining a different kind of community on campus and staying in touch with a local community back home. I think it's really important to make sure that we're organizing in our own communities. And I think sometimes... I know from me when I first started learning the language of social justice and freedom and all this stuff. I was taking it back home and kind of whipping it over people, I was just dropping it on people like a flood. And I realized that that wasn't gonna work. And so I had to really rethink how I was gonna communicate to my community with this new-found language in a way that wasn't condescending, you know, in a way that wasn't "oh I have the answers and y'all don't" and I've learned a lot of lessons about that along the way, but I'm still trying to figure it

out. So some students here on campus, or some folks listening who have, who have some answers, please let me know, because it is surely a struggle.

JT: So I know that you're here on campus to talk, you know, quite a bit about Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as nonviolence. So I thought, you know, we could switch into a conversation about that. So I imagine many people in the audience will have been raised with a very familiar narrative. Right? One which places Martin Luther King, Jr. as a moderate, nonviolent peacemaker who sought the full integration of African-Americans into American society, and the culmination of this legacy is often represented by reference to the 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech which he gave at the march on Washington. And, of course, this Martin Luther King Jr. is frequently juxtaposed with Malcolm X represented as a violent activist who espoused this "by any means necessary" ethos. So I'm wondering if we can just start, and I'd like to ask you to reflect on the stakes of this narrative. Right? What does this mean for American society, and in particular for American youth who are raised with this narrative through going to school.

NF: Absolutely, I love this question. I think you're hitting it on the nail when you say it's a narrative that we sort of are indoctrinated with from a very young age. So I'll first start by saying as many people who've gone to public school, probably private schools, as well. We all know the story of Martin Luther King, Jr. and we all know the story of Martin Luther King, Jr. versus Malcolm X almost as if it's a sport.

JT: There's even books written [LAUGHS].

NF: There's even books written. And so we know that narrative. The narrative goes something like this-- Martin Luther King, Jr.--as you said--was nonviolent, was about love, and primarily was seeking the integration of black people into mainstream,

JT: MmHm.

NF: American society. Malcolm X, on the other hand, was not about love, but was about hate. He affirmed, and preached violence, and he was looking for complete separation from mainstream American society. Both of those narratives are wrong, and need to be challenged with a better story. So I think one of the things that I want to start by saying is that we have to be really intentional about the stories that we tell, and we have to be really vigilant in telling a better story because the stories that we tell becomes the stuff of who we are. And so that narrative as you pointed out of Martin Luther King being solely nonviolent, and being about integrating into mainstream society has actual material

consequences. One, on our imagination and what we see as possible. We see it today we see this insistence that black people be nonviolent and nonviolent in a particular kind of way.

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

NF: And that insistence, I believe, comes from a system of white supremacy that is rooted in one one. One thing is white fear.

JT: MmHm.

NF: And that white fear becomes more important than black freedom, and it, and that white fear also constrains, I think, the black freedom struggle in many kinds of ways. And so I think we have to challenge the narrative for that reason. I think we also have to challenge it because it actually orients our political behavior.

JT: MmHm. MmHm. MmHm.

NF: And so we see today a Democratic Party and not only a Democratic Party but more specifically a black political class that has risen since the early 1970s who is also dancing and has been dancing with the Democratic party promoting this very narrative.

JT: MmHm.

NF: We should ask ourselves who made the narrative. We should ask ourselves what kind of work is the narrative doing.

JT: MmHm.

NF: And we should ask ourselves do we need to tell a different kind of story. My answer would be-- Surely we do. And as you pointed out you know Martin Luther King, Jr. has been appropriated by pretty much everyone.

JT: MmHm.

NF: And the question now is who's the real Martin Luther King, Jr. In the 1980s, we see Ronald Reagan appropriating Martin Luther King, Jr. to promote a colorblind society, which is really a way of not

implementing serious policy to address racial inequality. Republican. But then we see in the 90s Bill Clinton actually going to the same place that Martin Luther King, Jr. gives his mountaintop speech in 1967 or 1968, right before he was killed. [CROSSTALK]

JT: Before he died, yeah.

NF: And we see him saying if we were to give a report card of the last 25 years of the country what would Martin Luther King say. And he says essentially that if Martin Luther King was here today he would say "I didn't die for black people to kill other black people." So essentially he appropriates Martin Luther King, Jr. in order to [CROSSTALK] promote a black pathological narrative that the problem isn't white supremacy. The problem is black people.

JT: MmHm.

NF: I'm getting a lot of this from my advisers, but Eddie Glaude Democracy in Black which is actually very good. That wasn't a shout out. [LAUGHS]

JT: Yes it was [LAUGHS]

NF: [CROSSTALK] I just want to cite my sources as a junior scholar. And it's a shout out, it's a great book. And so we see this narrative being appropriated but we also have to remind ourselves there's a different kind of King that exists, and that story is being told, but it's not being amplified.

JT: MmHm.

NF: And so as you pointed out we have a radical King. We have a King who was not just simply fighting racism and discrimination, but was also fighting poverty, was also speaking out against war. One of his most controversial speeches is the 1967 "War against Vietnam" speech at the Riverside Church in New York City where, I mean, he begins really at this point to become a serious threat to the American government, and a serious threat to the status quo. Folks is like "OK, King, you could talk about race but don't you dare start talking about poverty and war. You're taking it too far." So making these connections and that make that King making those connections posed a serious threat to the, to the powers that be tells us something. I think it tells us that solidarities are dangerous. I think it tells us that radical imaginations that are able to connect capital to racial domination are dangerous,

JT: MmHm.

NF: But also have all types of possibilities, and I think it tells us something about who King was himself that he wasn't this not easily fit into a nonviolent narrative. I mean King said himself he said I rather for you to be violent than to be a coward.

JT: Right.

NF: That's not something that we hear in schools. That's not something that we hear on mainstream media, but it's something that King said. And so King is a site of contestation, and the question becomes what kind of story are we going to tell about him. He was also a complicated person. So I think that the temptation to romanticize

JT: MmHm.

NF: Is also dangerous. So we should just tell the truth about who he was. For better or for worse. And that he's pitted against Malcolm X as you pointed out. It's also another way for this Civil Rights oriented narrative to constrain our imagination.

JT: MmHm.

NF: You can be like King but don't you dare be like Malcolm X. Because to be like Malcolm X is to be a bad Negro.

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

NF: Is to be the kind of black that America. Americans don't like it.

JT: Right.

NF: And it's dangerous. And so I think that we need to trouble the categories, trouble the binaries, tell better stories, and realize that the stories that we tell actually orient our political behavior, our political imagination, and ultimately our quest for freedom.

JT: Right. Well I'd like to actually talk about you know some of the specific ways in which these narrative shape the kinds of actions and possibilities that are open to people. I know that oftentimes with students talking about you know the kinds of stories they were raised with in high school from a

distance. They're very capable of deconstructing the ideology behind for example MLK versus Malcolm X. But it's harder for them to take that step and say "oh yes it matters today." Right? They can say OK well I've been raised with the simplified narrative. But I think you know sometimes they see... they see it is as obscure how this actually matters for today. So can you... Is there an example that comes to mind that actually illustrates how the kinds of stories that we tell ourselves about the past reshape the future?

NF: I'll try I'll take a stab at it. So coming from a religious perspective more specifically a Christian tradition when you look at the history of Christianity more specifically when you look at the history of the United States, and how Christianity from the dominant side has been told, the story of Christ, the story of Jesus within sort of a white supremacist narrative. Goes a little something like this: Jesus was born, was perfect, was this, was primarily a spiritual person, by the way he was from Europe,

JT: MmHm.

NF: He was kind of like a European missionary, and he died for our individual sins. And if you believe in him you're gonna go to heaven.

JT: MmHm.

NF: No mention of the Roman Empire. No mention of the fact that he didn't simply die as Mark Taylor, our professor says, "Jesus didn't die of old age." [LAUGHS] He didn't just simply die.

JT: MmHm.

NF: But he was killed. He was indeed crucified which is the most horrific way and the most shameful way of dying, right? And it was a spectacle in many ways like [CROSSTALK] Death Row is today in the United States. And so I think when we look at the way Jesus has been appropriated and all kinds of ways, but particularly in this sense by those in power we see that they are particularly leaving out certain details in order to constrain our imagination and not allow for certain organizing activity. I'll give you a concrete example. Me growing up with this narrative because that's, you know, not just a white church narrative.

JT: Of course.

NF: That's the dominant narrative across white and black churches. I never thought that I could be both a Christian and a freedom fighter. It was not something that I saw as even possible.

JT: MmHm.

NF: So when I was in seminary and I began to learn about the history of Christianity, and the history of the United States, and how those two things got together. I refused to call myself a Christian because I didn't think it was possible. I didn't think it was possible to be a prison abolition, a prison abolitionist, and a Christian. I didn't think it was possible to to challenge police brutality in serious ways, and be a Christian.

JT: MmHm.

NF: I didn't think it was possible to have a serious critique of capitalism and be a Christian. It was not something that I saw.

JT: MmHm.

NF: Not in my churches not in my communities. And so tapping into first discovering this tradition of black liberation theology which is essentially another kind of story that's being told about Jesus that highlights the Roman Empire.

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

NF: That talks about how Jesus didn't simply die but was killed and crucified. That wasn't just simply a really good story that I enjoyed, but it began to actually orient me in political ways.

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

NF: So I, in my local church as a youth pastor, had my young the young people I was working with we wrote letters to people in prison. Not only did we write letters to people in prison but we could begin to do consciousness raising throughout the entire church about mass incarceration about beyond that. All of that sort of crises you see not only in black America but throughout the country and throughout the world. And so this different narrative began to make us talk differently. But not only talk definitely that talk began to actually be pulled into action. And so we were organizing in ways that we weren't before simply because we were telling a better story. And so I see a direct connection between storytelling.

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

NF: And the stories we tell and how we move about in the world. It literally orients what we do.

JT: Right. And I think, you know, I love the way that you're talking about this and I think, you know, the other part that comes to my mind as you're talking is you know the power of stories for Empire itself. Right. Or the state itself and the kinds of, you know, very vitriolic reactions to, for example, the protests in Ferguson when, you know, direct immediate parallels were being drawn between the Black Panther Party and what protesters on the street were doing. However, erroneous those comparisons might have been, but it was amazing how quickly the state was willing to, you know, in fact foist its own historical narrative onto the kinds of activities that were going on. So I'd like us to you know kind of press into a conversation about tactics. Right? So I know you're here to talk about nonviolence in many ways. But earlier you made this great comment that in fact, you know, nonviolence particularly as it's pressed upon black Americans is incredibly narrow. Right? So can you just... let's you start very broad. What is your own definition of nonviolence?

NF: Sure. I don't have a definition of nonviolence.

JT: OK.

NF: I don't have a definition of much the many things I'm not good at defining life seems to be way too messy for Webster's definition. However...

JT: Maybe talk about a range of what...

NF: I can say is that the kind of nonviolence that's sold to us and us being black folks in particular, but also those who are serious about challenging power, unjust power, is a particular kind of nonviolence that centralizes a sentimental love.

JT: Mmmm.

NF: That is, a love that isn't political, but a love that makes you look inward. That has something to do with the heart,

JT: Mmmm.

NF: But not material conditions.

JT: Mmmm.

NF: It's a kind of nonviolence that not only centralizes sentimental love, but it centralizes the trope of forgiveness. So we saw when nine people were slaughtered by a white supremacist in South Carolina we saw the immediate right from the media from white America.

JT: Mmmm.

NF: From all of us in many ways most of us and immediate. Well are you going to forgive them?

JT: Mmmm.

NF: Because, you know, black folks are supposed to be superhuman we're either subhuman or superhuman but were not human.

JT: Yeah.

NF: And so the sentimental love, this need for an immediate forgiveness, or cheap forgiveness is the one of the ways that were sold this kind of nonviolence. I think that's a very narrow minded nonviolence. I also think it's a very dangerous and misleading form of nonviolence. I think what King was talking about was something a little different.

JT: MmHm.

NF: I'm not an expert on King so I won't pretend to be one but I've read a bit about... I've read a bit of King's sermons and speeches. I mean he's still a hero of mine. Thankfully I haven't allowed the right to appropriate him for me. But I think King was talking about a different kind of nonviolence that wasn't about sentimental love but was about love as a force, a political force, love that eliminates the distance that oppression creates between us and thus making us confront our neighbors right? To use Christian language. Neighbors, right? Love for King wasn't something that just made us go to church and pray for white supremacists or white supremacy to go away.

JT: MmHm.

NF: But love was the thing that made you go out to the streets. Love was the thing that made you march, love was the thing that made you go and challenge, right? White supremacy at its core to its face.

JT: MmHm.

NF: That's a very different kind of love than sentimental love.

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

NF: The trope of forgiveness. I think while while I believe that King would care about forgiveness, would care about even redemption and reconciliation. I think King understood that it can't be cheap. It has to come at a cost. And it's not just going to cost black people constantly. Being... being asked to be some being more than human. But it's gonna cost something from white people.

JT: MmHm.

NF: It's going to cost. Challenge your identity, a challenge that you take yourself to be, a challenge to your privilege, and so forgiveness can't simply be as Bill Clinton said about mass incarceration--"Oh my bad, I know better now." That can't be forgiveness. If we're gonna talk about forgiveness at all. Then we first got to talk about freedom. We first have to talk about justice. We first have to talk about the conditions that help. That black people and poor people and all kinds of people in this country and around the world are catching. And so I think that's a very different kind of idea of nonviolence. I also think that, like, for example, growing up I didn't understand violence to be anything more than when blood was shed.

JT: Mm.

NF: Somebody was getting beat up over the head or somebody was screaming "Ow." If it wasn't those things and it must not be violence. I did not understand until later in my life--

JT: MmHm.

NF: That violence also takes the form of poverty, violence also takes the form of lack of health care, violence also takes the form of hunger, violence also takes the form of ghettoized conditions where you

are in like in Flint, Michigan given lead water by your own local government or by your state. And so I think we have to expand the very definition of violence itself.

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

NF: Not to simply be about whenever a bloodshed or whenever someone screaming "Ow." But that type of violence that also is manifested in our day to day living here in the United States but also throughout the world. And that kind of expansion of the definition of violence also makes us respond to violence very differently. So that's one point. Another point is thinking about Malcolm X we all heard it growing up--Malcolm X was violent. And the words we choose this goes back to storytelling--

JT: Mm.

NF: The words we choose are deeply political. Meaning when we call something this rather than that we are bringing something to into view and other things out of view.

JT: Right.

NF: And we're also saying these things are possible. All these other things are not possible. So when we call Malcolm X violent it's a condemnation of his entire legacy. It's to say that he's delegitimate. It is to say that his ideas are not valued, or not--don't have anything of substance. He's just simply some violent, you know, want to want to blow up America type of person. And what I understand Malcolm X to be doing wasn't violence but was about dignity, was about challenging black dehumanization,

JT: MmHm.

NF: Was about pride was about self-defense. Even when we think about Martin and I'm jumping all around here. But you know my mind is dancing with ideas even when we think about Martin Luther King he preached nonviolence. But his security guards were armed. So that goes to tell you maybe not something about King but it goes to tell you something about the conditions.

JT: Yeah.

NF: And how contradictions arise even in the midst of him preaching nonviolence. He had to have armed guards. Why? Because people were after him.

JT: Right.

NF: And didn't want him to continue to preach that. His... King's non-violence was dangerous and Malcolm's were not talking about violence, he was talking about dignity, he was talking about self-determination and things like that.

JT: Right. And I mean I think exactly like this. You know, the state recasting self-defense and self-determination as violence. Right? It is, you know, sort of exactly what's happened in the case of the Black Panther Party. Right? And again, I mean, I see this every semester. Ninety five percent of the students coming into the class have a simple association. Black Panther Party is violent. Right? And there's, you know, a lot of work that's been put into that narrative and the picture, the image they all have is of the Panthers you know standing with guns on the steps of the Sacramento State Capitol with no understanding of why they were actually there, the fact that it was legal at the time, or all of the various other activities that the Panthers were engaged in, which actually were more sustained than the arms themselves, so I'm wondering if you can even... I, you know, go into this question of-- does violence is that actually a legitimate term to apply to. Black liberation struggles. Is that even, you know, a category that can be brought in or is in fact that illegitimate way of talking about...

NF: Sure.

JT: Protest.

NF: So I don't want to make an essential claim meaning I don't want to say in all cases this or that. I do want to say that, as you say, casting self-defense casting the quest for black freedom as violence is not only curious but it's a part and parcel of white supremacy itself. It's a way of saying "That's not legitimate." It's a way of saying that defending yourself against white supremacy is immoral, which if anything is immoral, its White Supremacy itself. And so I don't want to make an essential claim but I do want to say that we have to be really careful of the words that are being used to frame our resistance and frame our struggle. I do think in several cases where we see the term violence being used as a way to frame our struggle. It is indeed not violence. I think we saw that with Malcolm X. I think we you know see that with a host of characters throughout the Black Radical Tradition who were who didn't simply say I'm going to let you beat me over the head and get away with it. And so I think you know I don't want to make an essential claim I do want to say that that term is oftentimes used to constrain and that we have to push back against it reframing our resistance. Reframing and setting the terms is just as important as the actual physical organizing oftentimes

JT: MmHm.

NF: Because again it makes what's possible, it illumens what's possible. And so I think that's important.

JT: So what does a liberated world look like for you?

NF: Oh man.

[LAUGHS]

NF: Wow. That's a great question, that's a great question. And I'm so glad you said "what does it look like for me?" Because while American democracy so far has been more of a farce than a fact, small d democracy matters, for me, at least. And so that means my vision is couched in a collective vision of many voices and many people and many imaginations. From my mother to the people out on the other side of the West coast, to the folks in the Philippines whom I never met. We all live in this world, we all gotta figure out how to live in it. My version of freedom, what does a liberated world look like? I'll just give a little, I'll try to paint a little bit of a picture, but it won't be exhaustive, because I... it's too big of a question, we would have to sit here all day, for the rest of our lifetime. [LAUGHS] I think the main thing is that it comes in our doing, and that, you know, dreaming about it is beautiful, but in the doing, in the everydayness of it, right? Is where we experience freedom itself. For me, freedom is a practice, it's not simply a destination. It's not somewhere we arrive to one day.

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

NF: Just like revolution is for me, it's a practice, it's a discipline, it's an art. It's a way of being and going about. Living in the world. One of the things I do want to highlight with my... one of the things I see as a liberated world, is for all children to be able to be carefree.

JT: Mm.

NF: I can't talk about all children around the world, but I can talk about black children in the United States.

JT: MmHm.

NF: I can talk about children in Newark, New Jersey, where I'm from. Many black children don't have access to the category of carefree. I think Tamir Rice is a premiere example, alongside Aiyana Stanley-Jones.

JT: MmHm.

NF: Seven years old, twelve years old. I don't want Aiyana Stanley-Jones and Tamir Rice to have to march. I don't want Aiyana Stanley-Jones and Tamir Rice to have to protest. I don't want Aiyana Stanley-Jones and Tamir Rice to have to hold up signs in order to live or to have a decent education. Or to make it back home without getting killed by the people who are sworn to protect them. I want them to dance, I want them to laugh, I want them to dream, I want them to go outer space. I want them to study astrology. I want them to do whatever the hell

JT: MmHm.

NF: Makes them happy. That, for me, is a liberated world. That for me, would be a big step in the direction towards freedom.

JT: That's a great answer. I got goosebumps over here. [LAUGHS] So we don't have much time left, and I know you're going to have quite a bit of opportunity to speak to students and faculty during your time on campus. So I'm wondering if you can talk to those people who you won't get to see in person. So, you know, we have a lot of inmates listening out at USP Lewisburg. I'm wondering, you know, given that, hearing the voice of Mumia was really your gateway into activism, what do you have to say to these folks?

NF: Well, first of all, to my brothers, to my sisters, to my kinfolk who are trapped in the system that is not intending for us to live, I want to say thank you. Thank you for your fight, thank you for your resistance, thank you for continuing to Freedom Dream as Robin D.G. Kelley tells us, as you said, it was Mumia Abu-Jamal, live from death row not from a classroom, not from the academy, not from an ivory tower that politicized me. That's my story. So for the many people who are in American cages who continue to write, who continue to resist, who continue to organize, who continue to dream against the ultimate nightmare. Thank you. I thank you because you're not invisible to me. I think about y'all. Even if

I never met you, and I pray--in my own faith--I pray for your sustaining and for your living. To the students and anyone else who might be listening from the community. Thank you for listening in, thank you. Maybe some of the things challenged your old ideas, and I thank you for taking the time to sit with that. Maybe you already felt all this, and you were just like "Yes, this is exactly how I feel." Thank you for standing in solidarity. I don't know a whole lot, but I do know that we gotta do something dramatic. We have to do something big. We have to do something beyond what we seen as possible if we're gonna be able to live in this world together in peace and in freedom and justice. So thank you for fighting and let's continue to fight.

JT: Well thank you so much for coming into the studio tonight, it's been a real pleasure talking with you now.

NF: Thank you.

[END]