WGS Research Seminar: Feminist Generations

Kerry Rittich: A very, very warm welcome to all of you to the first Women and Gender Studies Research Institute seminar for 2022 feminist generations, a conversation with Selma James, Margaret Prescod, and Chanda Prescod-Weinstein. Let me begin with an acknowledgement of the sacred land on which the University of Toronto stands and on which it operates. We work on indigenous lands and on the shores of the planets largest gathering of freshwater for thousands of years, it's been the home of Indigenous peoples. The Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishnabeg and most recently, the Mississauga's of the Credit First Nation. Today the meeting place of Tkaronto remains the home to many indigenous people from across Turtle Island. And we are immensely grateful to have the opportunity to work here, and to enter into respectful and caring relations.

So welcome, again, I am Kerry Rittich, and along with my friend and colleague, Alissa Trotz. And in fact, all of my colleagues at the Women and Gender Studies Institute, we'd like to extend a very, very warm welcome, especially to the many, many people who are joining us from all around the world today. We are convening a conversation among three absolutely extraordinary people Selma James, Margaret Prescod, and Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, who both together and separately, and in distinct and overlapping ways have made crucial interventions in a number of fields they've made ground-breaking forms of work and activism in transnational feminist anti colonial, anti-racist and of course anti-capitalist politics.

I want to just flag their particularly important contributions to work through their crucial organizing roles and networks such as wages for housework in markets case black women for wages for housework and of course the Global Women's strike. We now have a vastly expanded and deepened understanding of unpaid house and care work, its distribution and devaluation along racial as well as gender lines, It's links to the organization of paid work in capitalist economies, and of course, it's connections to broader questions of political economy and decolonization. As if this were not enough. and it's more than enough, the relationships among them both familial and political we think gives us a remarkable, and we now know unprecedented, opportunity to think about what connects what organizes, and what sustains activists' engagement over time. What linkages and of course what roadblocks might exist between practical and intellectual work, the academy and the community, but above all, how to think collectively and how to think, over time, about the possibilities and the perils along the paths forward as we confront new challenges, for example, ecological sustainability, even as all of the old ones continue.

Okay, their past work is already well known and cherished by many of us, but I wanted to say that

as I discovered when reading Chanda's recently released book, The Disordered Cosmos: A Journey into Dark Matter, Spacetime, and Dreams Deferred, there remain absolutely remarkable frontiers to explore and still more ways to approach these questions.

So, like our audience, our speakers today are joining us from different locales in the globe, Selma is in London, Margaret is in Los Angeles, and I believe, Chanda, correct me if I'm wrong, that you are in Cambridge, Massachusetts. And we just like to thank you immensely from the bottom of our hearts for your time, your work and your willingness to share some thoughts about the intersections between your work and your life today.

Before I hand it over to Alissa, to give a truly proper introduction to all our speakers, let me just briefly outline the plan for the rest of today. We'll begin with introductory remarks from Selma from Margaret and from Chanda. Then, Alissa and I have devised a number of questions that we'd like to post to all of them, and which we are confident will provoke a conversation among them, and for the remaining time we'd very much like to hear from you. So, we would invite you to put any specific questions, either to all of the speakers or to specific speakers into the Q and A, which we will monitor, and we promise to take up at least some of them at the very end of the session. And we will plan to wrap up by about 4:45 P.M., Toronto, Eastern Standard Time, in part because it's already nighttime for Selma. Alissa, over to you.

Alissa Trotz: Thank you, Kerry, and I'm really so delighted to be here with this remarkable trio, Chanda, who's actually in the New Hampshire seacoast, to meet Chanda for the first time, and to be with Margaret and Selma, who I've known and worked with for years, and we're connected forever through my late mentor and I.

This is incredible, the three of you have never actually been in public conversation before, which is remarkable to us, so thank you and you know we weren't sure if this was going to happen until Selma was like, well, I would be curious to know what this conversation would look like and Chanda was like okay fine let's do it so here we are with over four hundred of you we're so excited. Most of you are actually not in universities or academia when we looked at the list so it's a really diverse set of folks from a variety of institutional sites, we're getting all of this love in the chat and in the Q and A; folks who have just written a chapter on Margaret's work, please put your comments here, even if we don't get to all of the questions, Selma, Margaret and Chanda very much want to see all of them, and all of this love that you're sharing with them we will download all of that and send that to them, along with a list of all of your names so thank you so much.

And Selma has been with us before at the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto, I believe it was about in 2012, and of course Wages for Housework has had a history in Canada, one of those persons is, you know, our wonderful colleague Benita Lawrence up at York University who it seems

shows up for almost everything Selma speaks at, and is here today, thank you so much Benita, I found today an essay you wrote called Homeworking for Next to Nothing in an early, I think 1970s, edition of the Falling Wall Review the Social Factory so those Canadian connections are really present here, so thanks for being here.

I'm just going to introduce Selma, Margaret and then Chanda and then we will go immediately to each of them speaking for 10 minutes, locating themselves and their political and intellectual work before opening up to questions. So, Selma James is an anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-capitalist campaigner. She was born in Brooklyn, in 1930, I believe in August of this year Selma will be celebrating her ninety-second birthday. She was raised in a movement household. Joining C.L.R. James's Johnson Forest Tendency at fifteen and emigrating to London with her son, Sam Weinstein, to join C.L.R. after he was deported from the U.S. during McCarthyism. Selma worked with C.L.R. in the movement for federation and regional sovereignty in the Anglophone Caribbean between 1958 and 1962, So for Caribbeanists, Selma is really important on all kinds of grounds. Once back in London, she was the first organizing secretary of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination. In 1972 she founded the International Wages for Housework campaign and launched the Global Women's Strike in 2000, which Wages for Housework coordinates.

Most recently, Selma coordinates the Care Income Now campaign that was launched alongside the Green New Deal for Europe in 2020. She co-authored the classic Power of Women and the Subversion of Community which is widely understood to have launched the domestic labor debate. Selma also coined the word “unwaged” to account for and count, the caring work that is largely done by women on our planet. Selma is also a founding member of the International Jewish anti-Zionist network. She has edited, authored and co-authored several publications, including the one I think she would say is her favorite, Ujamaa: The Hidden Story of Tanzania Socialist Villages; and Sex, Race and Class the Perspective of Winning. And just a few months ago, and the cover is up here, with an amazing introduction by Margaret, the aptly titled, Our Time is Now: Sex, Race, Class, and Caring for People and Planet; and yes, folks, this was published when Selma was ninety-one years old.

Hailing from Barbados and based in Los Angeles, Margaret Prescod is the co-founder, with Wilmette Brown, of Black Women for Wages for Housework, more than four and a half decades ago and still going strong and is a coordinator of Women of Color in the Global Women's Strike. Margaret is the author of Black Women Bringing It All Back Home and is an award winning, nationally syndicated, journalist on Pacifica radio, perhaps best known in this regard for her incredible program Sojourner’s Truth, which she is host and executive producer of. Margaret founded the Black Coalition Fighting Back Serial Murders in the 1980s, I believe there's an award-winning film on HBO about this if folks wanted to find out some more about that,

and she is co-founder of Every Mother is a Working Mother network. Margaret has been actively engaged in the ongoing struggle for justice and liberation for Haiti, this is a central part of what she does and how she understands herself, organizing as part of the Haiti Working Group of the Global Women's Strike.

Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, is the daughter of Margaret Prescod and the granddaughter of Selma James and assistant professor of physics and astronomy and core faculty in Women and Gender Studies at the University of New Hampshire. Chanda actually was an undergraduate student at the University of Waterloo and just recently received the University of Waterloo Faculty of Science Distinguished Alumni Award for 2021, I believe Chanda is probably the youngest person to receive that award. Her scientific research focuses on particles and cosmology, Chanda also conducts research in Black Feminist Science, Technology and Society Studies and is the author of the incredible, I read it, the cover is just absolutely stunning, and a tribute to black folks everywhere, the author of The Disordered Cosmos: A Journey into Dark Matter, Spacetime and Dreams Deferred. It's a fierce and loving invitation to collectively assemble a more liberal tree science practice. Chanda is also a columnist for the New Scientist and Physics World, and is winner of the 2021 Edward Bouchet Award from the American Physical Society.

That's more than enough from Kerry and myself, we will open with Selma, move to Margaret and then Chanda. So Selma, over to you.

Selma James: Thank you so much and what a generous introduction to us all. I have to begin my story with the 1930s, because that's the year I was born, and I think it was the one, I think it's one of the most extraordinary decades, certainly that I have lived through. In 1917, there was a revolution which women began in creating the Soviet Union, whatever happened to it afterwards, it was the work of millions of people that changed the world and change the whole world. We were aware that in some country in the world, the working class was in charge, and it changed our lives.

In 1918 there were many changes, also the war was over, and in 1929, another war in a way was begun because the economy fell apart, and in 1930, I made my entrance into the world that was created by these events, and there were many things that happened in that decade. It was a decade of working-class struggle, the first sit-ins in ’36, the revolution in Spain, a struggle against racism, the struggle against, the struggle for, the men who were accused, the black men who were accused of rape and whom after a great campaign we won. “The Scottsboro boys shall not die,” I remember when I was about three or four, I learnt those words, I'm not sure I understood what they meant. But that was my background and part of a community of people who were involved in the movement, in the anti-capital this movement, in the working-class movement, in the anti-racist movement. And in a way, even though it was not mentioned, it was a women's movement too, women wore trousers for the first time, among other things, but we made up our feelings, and our understandings

felt there, and it was a great education for me to be part of that movement, and the concepts that I learned there I have used all my life. They've been the framework of my mind.

My father was involved in building a trade union in fact, which the whole family of course was in some way involved in, even me. And in 1945, after the war, after the bomb had dropped, and it was advertised on my fifteenth birthday, and I understood that the world had changed. I knew that I wanted to be part of an organization of socialists, and I didn't know where to go, so I went to a couple of organizations on spec, so to speak, and I finally decided to be part of the youth group of a Trotskyist organization which my older sister was part of and I soon found myself in the minority, which was led by C.L.R. James, I was very interested in what he had to say, I didn't understand a lot of it, but I understood he intended to win and that was enough for me to be going on with.

I remember in those days there were a couple of things that stood out in my mind. One of them was a class on black history, where I heard about the dialectic for the first time and he told my sister that my eyes lit up when he mentioned, the dialectic, and they still light up for the dialectic. What can I do, I understood a lot more about how to view politics and how to view history from the one session than I intended. As I became more involved in what was called the Johnson Forest Tendencies, I understood, most importantly, that what James was proposing was another kind of organization from what the left was, which was based on what he called the "third layer" that is those of us in the society who don't have any kind of purchase on power who are, you know most of the world, most of the world in every country and he tried to build an organization that was based on the feelings, impulses, and deep ideas of the people who are at the grassroots. At some point he asked me, because I was working on, he asked me to write a book and write a pamphlet about women. I told him I hadn't done it because I didn't know how to write a pamphlet, and he said it's very simple you just put some, every sentence you think about you put it in a shoe box and one day you open the shoe box and put the sentences together. Well, I did that, and A Woman's Place was the result, which is still being published today. But the experience, of trying to build an organization, when it's based on the grassroots, when the whole of society was against it, when the whole of society was trying to create a hierarchy among us, because that was the way capital was structured was a big experience for me.

We got together, he and I, in various ways and when he had to leave the U.S., he was never quite deported he left before he was deported, he went back to England where he had been for some years. When he left, I tried to join him and, in a year, or a year and a half, with my young son Sam, I did. And we were very important to each other, not only personally, but I became his secretary, and I learnt a lot, doing that work, I typed his books and at that time, without computers, it was a lot of work you had to type and retype and retype. In '58 he was asked to come, to go back, to Trinidad and work with the new Federation and asked what I thought about

going and I said sure, and we all went, and I had the five years in the West Indies, learning a lot about governments, how attractive, they are to all kinds of ambitious people and even those who are not ambitious, becoming ambitious, when they see the possibilities of power, as it is associated with government. And I saw how governments work because I was very closely, not doing the work of government, watching what C.L.R. was doing and learnt from that, helped him to put it out the newspaper, worked on the newspaper, helped publish the first book that was ever published in Trinidad called Party Politics in the West Indies.

The Federation failed and that was a big experience for me too. I went back to England, the family returned to England, and shortly, I was involved in the anti-deportation and anti-racist movement, until the women's movement burst out, and I felt that I wanted to be involved in that, as well as well as anti-racism, I couldn't separate the two in my mind. And by 1972, I decided that we had to find out what was women's specific relation to capital, and I thought, it's the fact that we reproduce the whole working class and in fact, we reproduce everybody in the society, and we are not given any wage for it. Demanding wages was a way for having an international movement because this was a situation of women internationally and it meant that we no longer worked as the subsidiary of men, and we're no longer dependent on them financially, as we often were, even if we worked outside the home we got much less than they did and we were still dependent on a man's paycheck, which opened the way to all kinds of brutality which women, we know about this and it still goes on, which women had suffered, always trying to make sure that our children's needs were met. That was our contribution, and it was a very anti-capitalist, and I might add, very anti-racist action and concern.

It was that that really brought me together with Margaret Prescod, because in 1975 The Wages for Housework Campaign had an international conference on the basis also of something I'd written called Sex, Race and Class, talking about the autonomy of black women and their right to decide, with or without men, and in what way, etc. That was a statement about autonomy, Margaret found that useful, and so did another woman, Wilmette Brown, and the two of them came to England, and we met, and we have never parted in crucial ways since then. They are extraordinary women and Margaret has been an extraordinary spokeswoman for the campaign, for the whole campaign. Our relationship is based on the fact that we are both trying to do the same thing in different places, and often in different ways. And when she married my son Sam, it meant that we were also family, so that Chanda, when she was born, was my granddaughter, and the work, continued. It was always the work that brought us together because it wasn't the job like any other.

It was your life's work that you were trying to build an international movement, which meant you had to be anti-racist, not only anti sexist, and that every sector of the working class was going to make up a movement of that coin. We had redefined the work that women did as work for

capital, and therefore we redefined the working class. It was not that few white men with a few men of color in the metropolis, it was all of us in the whole world, on the land, in the home and, as well as in the factory and the office and the hospital that made up this force, which we felt had, would, come together, had to come together and we would help to build that movement, and that's what we've been doing ever since.

Alissa Trotz: Thank you so much, Selma, we're going to go straight to Margaret.

Margaret Prescod: Wow Selma, that was fantastic you covered so much in the time that you had, really appreciate that, and speaking a little bit about myself. I'm an immigrant, to the United States from Barbados, I know that there are a lot of Bajans up in Canada, a lot of us Bajans tend to go a lot to the quote unquote, mother country, the UK, also to the United States as well as to Canada. So, I was born and raised there, in a village, I grew up in St. George, Christ Church, for any people who hail from Barbados who happen to be listening, which in those days was considered a small village. I wasn't from town, and even in an island as small as Barbados, 14 by 21 miles, there was an urban, rural divide, and there were also village to village divisions. There were those of us who are considered upcountry, like my grandparents and like my aunties, who were, where my father was born and raised, the Prescod clan so to speak, from Brereton's village in St. Philip, any people from St. Philip in the audience, versus those of us in the villages from Christ Church who for some reason, we're not considered upcountry, so you go and figure that. And of course, there were also racial divisions, there was the old plantocracy which was still in place when I grew up, I grew up for example, in a house that was referred to as a chattel house. I really didn't make the connection, if you will believe this, with chattel slavery until I was grown. And our village was in old slave quarters, down the hill from the plantation house, closest to us, which was a newton in Christ Church. Turns out it was relatively recently discovered that the area of Newton has the largest known slave cemetery found today in the entire Western hemisphere.

The slavery of Barbados very, very brutal, over 650,000 souls, the slavery in Barbados was so brutal that they imported the slavers to the Carolina coast to train them in how to torture slaves. Our island was flat, there were no mountains, we had nowhere to run, but into the sea, and Barbados produced enormous wealth for England and also universities in the United States like Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Brown, Rutgers, and many others, really got a huge boost with money coming out of Barbados, and indeed Barbados was considered the society, the first society, that was entirely based on slavery. There was nothing else going on, and it was there where they worked it out, and then exported it around the world. So, I grew up basically right next to this largest slave cemetery except we didn't know about it growing up, and to my sorrow and the sorrow of my siblings, we were afraid and mortified that we were, that what we would call galivanting, or playing around, on what we now know is sacred ground. Even within the churches they were segregated, the Church

of England, the Anglican Church - of which I was raised - was segregated when I was younger. White people tended to go to the seven o'clock service in the morning, us darkies went to the later service, and even in the later service the few white people who showed up, they would sit in the front rows and the rest of us, sat in the back.

Now of course since our independence, in 1976, a lot of this is changing now people are sitting in church wherever they damn well please and as of November of last year, when Barbados ditched the Queen and established ourselves as a Republic who knows what's next, with our newfound sense of self and independence, what we may very well demand, well, reparations being one.

I would also say to Selma, and others, that my first political act, when thinking about this presentation, I actually think I did it when I was four years old. Let me explain what that is. My grandmother who had lived in the United States since my mother was three years old, came for a long visit of several months to Barbados, and brought with her my American born Cousin John Barton, who was close to my age. Apparently, the hope was that he and I would bond so closely and thus I would be convinced to leave my immediate family and go with my grandmother and cousin to the US for what they described as a better life. I refused and ran out of the house. There was no way I was going to leave my mother, father, sister, brother, no matter how much of a big house they said I would live in, or how many pretty, pretty dresses I would have. I prefer to live close to relative poverty to the riches of the United States and to be torn apart from my family. The work that I'm doing now in child welfare, so many children being taken and put up for adoption and in foster care, torn from their families, I'm very much reminded of that. I didn't think about that as a political act but I'm thinking that it actually was.

I eventually lost that battle because my mother with my two siblings, my brother, who was a Vietnam vet, and my sister, Roz, emigrated to New York City. And then we arrived in New York City, we only realized upon arrival that our housing had fallen through and so we were divided, my brother and my mother went to live in Queens with my grandmother, and an aunt and my sister and I went to live in Brooklyn with another aunt, and as hard as that was, as luck would have it, my Aunt Mel, that my sister and I lived with in Brooklyn, was a school teacher at public school 161 in Brooklyn, and an activist in Brooklyn core. Turned out her father was a Garveyite, she had a different father than my mom, she was, Aunt Mel who's now deceased, was recently honored by one of her former students when he was inaugurated as the new superintendent of schools and New York City. The inauguration was held outside PS 161 where Aunt Mel taught for so many years, and the new superintendent spoke about how Aunt Mel had changed his life and held up a picture of her, it was all over the television, so you can imagine for a Caribbean family that was a very proud moment, for any family. But when it comes to me and my sisters, Aunt Mel took us two weeks after we arrived in the United States where we landed

to daily anti-racist demonstrations that were part of the civil rights movement, the civil rights movement, which was blowing up at the time, and that act in a very real sense, became my first political engagement in the United States. My Aunt Mel also fought the racism faced by my sister and I in high school, university to me I'll have to admit, all you students out there, it was a blur of protests and, you know, some parties thrown in there as well.

Anyway, I did graduate, I became a teacher, and I was part of the Community Control of School Struggle in Ocean Hill Brownsville, as part of the Afro-American Teachers Association, where we confronted the racism against black and Puerto Rican students. It was there that I got to work with, and was trained, by welfare mothers. Welfare mothers were central to that struggle, although they have not been credited to being central to it, we raised all kinds of help. They taught me what their children needed. Together we fought for free breakfast program and the schools who work with the Black Panther Party to bring in the free breakfast program, and my third-rate students at PS 165 in Brooklyn. Ocean Hill Brownsville were also part of the campaign to free Angela Davis, and they won an award for a play they wrote about her. And by the way, this nonsense you hear about low achievement in inner city schools, and they can't learn and all of that, my students in the third grade were reading and discussing New York Times articles, they had a teacher who loved them, who respected them, and who put in the work, and who also was grounded and connected to the community that they came from.

Okay, fast forward. I left Ocean Hill Brownsville and became a reading teacher, in the seat program at Queens College in the City University of New York. That's where I met Andaiye, the late Andaiye from Guyana, who then became a lifelong friend of mine I just think of her practically every day. And a woman, Wilmette Brown, who was a former Panther, who co-founded Black Women for Wages for Housework with me. We immediately had to confront the racism of racism, the racism of white women in the New York Wages for Housework committee. They did not approve of the organizing we were doing at Queens College for the right of mothers on welfare to keep their student grants and their welfare without either being cut and for book money for students, many of whom were the children of welfare mothers, they didn't consider that wages for housework, but we did. And when we became active in the UN Women's Decade in preparation for the first US congressionally mandated Conference on Women and we wanted to put out a Black Women for Wages for Housework newsletter, they refused to help us.

So what we did, we called Selma James all the way in London, England, we knew that Selma had training on race, after all she wrote Sex, Race and Class which I write about in the introduction of Selma’s anthology Our Time is Now, I have the anthology here, and encourage all of you to be able to get a copy of it, Sex, Race, Class and Caring for People and Plant, I do talk about that, I also still have Andaiye’s book right here The Point is to Change the World, edited by our very own Alissa Trotz.

So, and also, the work that she did being the partner, politically, most importantly politically with C.L.R. James and if you're from the Caribbean, everybody knew C.L.R. James as a hero of ours, but Selma stood with the black woman, she made sure that we got the resources to put out our newsletter called Sapphire.

The work we did at that conference in Houston, Texas in 1977, is now historic because together there's the great leaders of the National Welfare Rights Organization Johnny Tillman, Beulah Sanders, Frankie Jeter, white woman Christine Marston out of Washington State. We threw out the welfare resolution that the feminists were going along with and had been put forward that was a workfare resolution meaning, in order for single mothers to get a little bit of money to help raise their children, they would be forced to go take a job, outside the home for next to nothing. We threw that out, we rewrote it, and the language that we put in said that women receiving welfare should have the dignity of it being called a wage, let me just say one other thing though about what happened in New York, with Black Women's Wages for Housework because some people are writing about it and there are all kinds of false stories, floating around as though the Wages for Housework campaign ended in 1977. Give me a break. The racism of it is just outrageous because some white women in New York, we broke with them, actually, the split was over race, that the rest of us are erased, and I have to say that one of the big shot theorists, I was told, of Wages for Housework campaign, you know, from Europe, the first time she met me, I walked through the door and she asked me to clean up some water that was on the floor because she just assumed I was the maid. That is a story that to this day, really upsets my daughter Chanda greatly.

Anyway, we went on, we did the work in Houston, I only have 10 minutes so there's not a lot of time to go into all of the other work that we were involved in, the UN Women's Decade, the resolution, the UN resolution that we won on measuring and valuing under wage work, the whole international and global campaign that we pulled together and read from conference to conference from Copenhagen, 1980, to Kenya, Nairobi in 1985 to Beijing, China in 1995. Here, we finally won the resolution to measure and value unwaged work in the home, on the land and in the community.

One thing I wanted to say too just quickly wrapping up, is that for me, especially, but I think for the whole of the Wages for Housework campaign because there was also a conference in London on immigration, we understood that that valuation of not valuing, unwaged work first of all, impacted women, but it impacted the whole of the global south. We all know that a lot of the work and resources that sustains the lifestyle of those of us who live in the global north, come from the global south, it's almost like the whole of the global south are housewives, low waged to the global north. So we understood that measuring and valuing that work was not only central to exposing the capitalist lie that women's and unwaged work doesn't contribute to their wealth and their accumulation, but it also

exposes how much they're ripping us off in Barbados, how much they're ripping us off in Haiti and the whole Caribbean region, the whole of the global south, by saying that we're not productive while they are sucking our life's blood and living off of the work that we do. A lot of work that I did around the devaluation of the life of black women, which is connected to the work that I did and I'm still doing around the serial murders of black women in South LA.

I have to say that of everything that I've done, one of the most challenging jobs that I have had, is that of being a mother and I'll have to say that my daughter Chanda she helps to center me, she's better known as sweetie, so if you hear me call her sweetie I'm her mother. I'm allowed to do that. You'll know what it's about. She really continues to challenge and center me to this day, and she is a scientist. She is an activist in her field. I couldn't be more proud of her. I hope to be able to share more details about the politics that myself and Selma, Nina and Phoebe and so many of us in the Wages for Housework campaign and the Global Women's Strike, which is now in India, and Peru, you know, in Thailand and Ireland the UK, in the United States the work that we do on behalf of the Haitian revolutionaries as the Haiti Working Group within the Global Women's Strike, hopefully they'll have some time to talk a bit more about that, but I just wanted to give you a bird's eye view of my early days, and what really helped to form me to get me to where I am and by the way, Selma mentioned that I was married to Sam her son. I think it speaks to the politics that we have done, Sam and I are divorced, long time divorce, and before, Sam, and after Sam, my relationship with Selma has continued the political relationship that we have had, including some of the work with Sam that he's doing now with Payday Men's Network and I think that speaks, really, to the work itself, and what it is we're trying to do to change the world. Thank you.

Alissa Trotz: Thank you so much, Margaret for that, and Sam is here today with us and thank you for bringing everyone into the room with you, Phoebe, Nina who's sitting right next to Selma, so many of you who are on this call today, Maggie, Renee thank you so much. This has been so deeply moving between you and Selma, you've just charted decades and I was really moved to hear you refer to, sweetie, who is about to speak, who we keep making mistakes about, So Chanda actually did her undergrad work at Harvard and her grad work at Waterloo. We will turn it over to you, Chanda.

Chanda Prescod-Weinstein: Everyone can hear me? Okay, good. So, thank you so much, Alissa and Kerry and everyone who's staffing this. I am, I want to start by saying, I am shaped by the Tonga land that I grew up in relation with and I'm now working to live in good relations with the Wabanaki homeland and people. I also just want to acknowledge, there are a lot of people in the audience from the Wages for Housework campaign who played a big role in raising me, so not just my, my father, Sam Weinstein, and my stepmother Marie [muffled] who are in the audience but also there are just a lot of people who have already been named from the Wages

for Housework campaign so I just want to acknowledge that.

In some sense, the subject today is thinking about Wages for Housework. And I think, you know, the question that I kind of want to put forward to people, as, as we think for the rest of the day, and beyond with each other is that, in a way, Selma and my mother have been my two most significant political influences in thinking about this question of what makes social function possible? So, what makes society possible, and specifically, what is the labor that makes for me as a scientist, what is the labor that makes the work of science possible? But there are a lot of different ways that we can slice that right? So, one of the things that I'm doing when I acknowledge the people who played a role in raising me is acknowledging that there is labor that produces my presence here and that has contributed to my presence here. And my mother certainly did the bulk of that work but she was not alone in doing that work and I think that as a single mother she was supported greatly by having a network of people who were thinking about these political questions and translated that into action. So not just theorizing but actually putting into practice what does it mean to sustain a single black mother who is doing organizing work.

So as a theoretical physicist, I'm a theoretical cosmologist and particle physicist by training and by daily practice. So, I know at least one of my students is in the audience right now, thank you for coming,

so I actually spent most of today thinking about particle physics and thinking about what the dark matter problem is. I also do work in Feminist Science Technology and Society Studies and the big questions that I'm thinking about is how can black feminism inform us working in better relations with each other, within the sciences, and underpinning all of that is thinking about what are the power relations, as I think my mom has said to me I don't know countless times, what are the power relations that are at work in the environment that we are in, what is shaping how we relate to each other. And so again, what is the labor that makes the work of science possible?

And so, I also wanted to acknowledge someone who is not physically here with us anymore. But thinking through, my first math teacher was my grandmother Elsa, my mom's mother, who was a teacher. I grew up, sitting at the table with her in Brooklyn, watching her tutor other black children in the neighborhood. And that is one of the reasons I was considered advanced in math as a child, was because I was sitting there watching her tutor. Someone asked me yesterday, how did I learn how to teach, she was my first teacher about, about how to teach. So, I want to name that as the labor that produces me as a scientist, that caretaking work of feeding me, of taking care of me, you know, creating space for my mom to do her own work by doing that childcare, watching me. I also want to name like an important piece of work that she did which is that the Wages for Housework campaign would occasionally descend on New York to lobby at the United Nations, and I got to go on one of

those trips and that was quite an experience and their home base for those activities was my grandmother's house in Brooklyn. She cooked for them, she let them take over her kitchen, people stayed all over the house. And she just did that housework. And so, I also want to talk about that, I wanted to mention that housework that made the organizing for Wages for Housework possible. Mom, I'm really sorry for making you cry, that was not the intention. But again, for me, I want to put that out there as a lesson for me of how we need to look holistically at the power relations at the support, at the unwaged work that makes all of the things that we do together, whether it is our organizing work or not, possible. So, I just want to name my grandmother Elsa as someone who really provided an influence there.

So, I'm going to try and stay on the shorter side, because I know we also have questions to get to. The thing that I want to land at is I also want to acknowledge, in particular, I want to name Uahikea Maile who is an assistant professor at the University of Toronto who is in the audience. He is Kanaka Maoli, he's a native Hawaiian, and I want to identify the University of Toronto, as one of the institutions that is supporting the building of the 30-meter telescope on unceded Kanaka Maoli land. The 30-meter telescope is a proposed instrument, it would be the largest in the world, Kanaka Maoli knowledge keepers and cultural knowledge holders have been opposing the building of this instrument for a long time. So I just want to mark that piece of all of our complicated institutional relationships that even as we are employed by these institutions that we are sometimes called to resist them or primarily called to resist them, often in the work that we do. And I just wanted to share a little bit about my journey and becoming part of the community that works in solidarity and in conversation with Kanaka Maoli people.

When I was in college, and this is why the fact that I went to Harvard is relevant, I was extremely a fish out of water at Harvard in a bunch of ways that, well you can read about it in my book if you want, I talk a little bit about it. One of the stories that I tell in the book is that when I was a junior, with a completely like flailing GPA, but also with aspirations to go to graduate school, I was offered the opportunity to take a job at a new telescope on Mauna Kea in Hawaii that would have written my ticket academically, I would have been able to get into any graduate program, the salary that they were offering me was twice what my mother had basically raised me on and it was an incredible opportunity. I turned it down after I read that there was a picket line. I wrote to the guy who offered it to me and said I don't cross picket lines I grew up in a labor family and this is really, I spent a lot of time on picket lines with my dad Sam and with my stepmother Maria Alvez as a kid, so I understood picket lines and that we just don't cross them.

The reason that I want to mention that example, so that was my first introduction, nobody in the astronomy community at the time was talking about questions of ethics and ethical responsibility to the people of the land or the land that we use, we were taught that astronomy was completely separate from these ethical

considerations. In that moment, I was asked the question, by the universe, by, you know, coincidence however you want to think about it, was I going to choose personal success over solidarity? And repeatedly in my career I had to choose solidarity over personal success and it has come at cost, including talking about the 30-meter telescope in public, there were jobs that were closed off to me, I spent eight years as a postdoc and certainly part of that was the organizing work that I did around the 30-meter telescope.

I'm not saying that because I think I'm some kind of hero or champion, but only to say it to make manifest the institutional pressures that are working on us if we have curiosities that we want to follow through, the academy is making this promise to us that there are things that we can have, as long as we're able to leave our values behind. And there was this question of one, I wasn't going to cross the picket line but the second time that I was really confronted with the question of solidarity with the protectors of Mauna Kea was in the winter of 2014-2015 and at that moment, one of the things that was different for me was that I more fully understood myself, not just as a black woman who grew up in the United States, middle name Sojourner, the Sojourner was Selma's idea, as far as I understand it, but I also understood myself as someone who maybe had not been born and raised in the islands, but was of Barbados. So, the question that I asked myself was, these Island people, if they were my island, people, what would I want other island people to do? And so, there was an element of my identity as a Caribbean person that was shaping the call to solidarity, that if what is happening on Mauna Kea was happening in Barbados, I would want people to stand with me and so I was going to stand with the other islands people over the world, and their fight for autonomy over their land.

So, all of this comes back in some way to thinking about Wages for Housework, which for me was my first box of thinking about what are the power relations and what are the power relations that we don't talk about? So, we can talk, and I love talking, about the night sky and how beautiful the night sky is, and we could talk about how beautiful the images from the 30-meter telescope would be and I have done that, in fact, with the Keahi, what I found was that people were very curious about the telescope contrary to what a lot of astronomers were saying in public. But we need to talk about the power relations that produce those images. So, for me, Wages for Housework teaches us it's not just about the movement to get wages for homework and I think that that's a really critical thing, I think during this pandemic people have realized that housework is work, those worlds have started to collide in ways that people weren't willing to acknowledge before, but I think it also trained me to think in a particular way and I think that that's also important Sometimes this is a training ground for helping you to see things that otherwise we're trained not to see. So I'll stop there.

Margaret Prescod: Thanks sweetie.

Kerry Rittich: What an absolutely astounding set of reflections about history, about context, about where you've come from, about the communities in which you're embedded. Maybe we can all turn on our cameras, Alissa at Selma, at this point, and microphones and open this conversation up, still more. We had actually imagined beginning our questions, with a focus on relationships but, as you've all heard, Selma, and Margaret and Chanda have way out script this. They've given us immense, immense insight already into the foundational absolutely crucial role of relationship to everything that they've done so I feel at this point compelled to say is there anything more, and more specific, that you would want to share with us now about the role of the relationships among you, in your learning and your politics.

You're all part of this remarkable multi-generational family of transformational anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-sexist activism. You're clearly utterly connected to each other but is there anything more you want to share about the force and the fabric of those relationships in your life and in your politics. And anyone should feel free to just jump in, or say something, at this point.

Selma James: Yeah, I think that what we have learned from the struggles of women we have been involved with has transformed us and that begins, very early, you know, in the '30s, my mother used to break the law of the flat, where a family had been put on the street and moved the furniture back in because she said they had a right to be there whether they could pay the rent or not and my mother was five foot tall and when she told me the story she said, "I'm five foot but I moved that rice box in" and that was part of how I grew up knowing the normal struggles that women have been involved in. In Trinidad and Tobago, the women made all kinds of arrangements in order to be able to be part of the movement and told the men they had to leave, they have to go to meetings the men had to take care of the children so that they could do that and the independent struggle and the Federation struggle meant that they used it in order to liberate themselves. One woman had to climb out of the window because her husband would lock her in, I only heard about that recently. We found ways of struggling and Margaret came in with that understanding of Wages for Housework, that she got from the Welfare Mothers, which was a tremendous movement, and I couldn't understand, and still do not, how you can have a movement of millions of women, which is not called the women's movement because the women are demanding money and because they are not white. You know, this has been an agitation for me, and really talks about the class line in feminism and the race line in feminism which clearly echoes that more than once.

Also, we've been involved in a number of countries, Margaret spoke about some of them, and I want to at a later point today speak about how the autonomy works in such a way that we can be involved in all kinds of struggles and they can be involved in struggles through us, where the differences among them are not dividers but strengths that each has and draws on when they

need to. That's what our work is based on, it's based on our concentrating on our own struggle, but never ignoring or forgetting or refusing to support other struggles and to understand how much these other struggles, which don't seem to be ours, are in fact ours.

Maragret Prescod: I could add just quickly a couple of things. One is that I remember, and I think this was maybe just after I was four, lying on the grass in my village and of being a little hungry because maybe we had one meal, right, for the day and thinking that I'm hungry, no child should ever have to be hungry and when I grow up, I want to do something about it and I think that has something to do with it. Also, Chanda talked to about my mother, mom, Elsa, and one of the things I realized that she was training us in in our village, you know at dinnertime, we were pretty hungry, and there was an elder who lived across the street name Miss Rice and my mother would say “before you sit down and eat that food you take this food across the street to Miss Rice,” and my sister and I would say “but Mummy, can we eat first?” And then we’d take the food and she'd say “no, she eats first and then you sit down and eat” and I didn't realize the lesson that my mother was teaching me.

You asked about the relation, so, the first time I went to London, and I was driving around with Selma, you know we worked our butt off, I grew up next to a cane field in Barbados I saw hungry people, how hard people work, none of the wealth or most of it wasn't there. At that time, there wasn't even much of a middle class in Barbados. I went to England, and I was shocked, when I went to visit poor Solvang was living in some squat with no electricity, no water, people had rising damp on the walls and driving around I saw this big able statue that I think Queen Elizabeth or something had made for her son Prince Albert and I broke down and I wept and Selma understood that. I knew that Selma understood why I was, it wasn't just some missionary comfort thing she knew the whole experience and what was being expressed as a former colonial in that moment, about relationships among us.

One other thing I want to mention about Chanda, I don't know if she remembers, I can't remember what grade she was in, but Chanda decided that she was going to make up, she had a little rainbow flag, I think this was maybe before the rainbow flag was the LGBTQ flag, but anyway, it represented the globe, it had a globe in the middle of it, and Chanda got up and did a pledge of allegiance to the earth. She was just a little thing, and somehow, she got invited onto the stage, Chanda, I can't remember the name of that big performer he was very, very popular in the LA coliseum…

Chanda Prescod-Weinstein: MC Hammer. She’s talking about M.C. Hammer.

Margaret Prescod: MC Hammer, and there was little Chanda standing with her flag, making her statement on the environment, and for the earth, and that was just something that just so, so moved me. So, I just wanted to share a few of those stories about the family and about some of the things that that

happened and those kinds of interactions.

Kerry Rittich: Thank you so much, Margaret. Thank you.

Alissa Trotz: Chanda did you have any thoughts?

Chanda Prescod-Weinstein: Yeah, I mean, so I feel like I'm, as a physicist, I think in terms of symmetry right, so I'm thinking of all the things that are not symmetric here. You know, I had the unusual experience relative to my mom and Selma of knowing them my entire life and Selma was talking about before, she's only known me for a little under 40 years, which I appreciate the generosity of saying, a little under 40 years. Although, we're coming up on the 40-year mark of our acquaintance in not too long.

So, I think there's a comment here to be made about what it means to be a movement baby, and I think something that isn't, I talked about enough, either out, in my experience, in organizing spaces or actually in the academic literature that I have read about organizing, is the particular experience of what it is to be a movement baby. So, I grew up with a cohort of what were at the time called “campaign kids” and I just have to kind of make a sidebar comment about that, you know in these stories, my mom was mentioning earlier, the discussions that for example in Sylvia Federici’s work, the suggestion that the Wages for Housework campaign ended in 1977 or collapsed in 1977, and I was born in 1982, so I don't know how you explained my entire childhood as a campaign kid if there was no Wages for Housework campaign or any of the photos that I have of myself in front of Wages for Housework banners. There is a way in which I had people who were like siblings to me, we were not at all in biological relation with each other, but we had this this cohort.

There’s also, I think it would be fair to say, a sacrifice that is asked of children of the movement. Particularly because our parents are being asked to make sacrifices and their sacrifices do get passed down and do become part of the entire family relation. So, I think that that's one of the, you know, when we talk about power relations it's one of the relations that needs to be made manifest. And when I talk about parents making sacrifices like as I wrote in my book, I think in an alternate universe where my mother didn't have to you know struggle to ensure that children didn’t starve, and I want to be clear that I think it's incredibly important that she's done that work, but in an alternate universe I think she would have been an amazing professional fashionista. Like if I at all ever look cool it's because like she trained me to look cool. There's this whole artistic side to my mother that has had less time because the world needed saving.

So I think you know there are a lot of different ways to slice that but I think you know the thing that I want to say since I have a captive audience is to start thinking about what does it do to our family relations to be called to do this work and that is that is challenging and I think it's challenging everybody on each side of that has

their own experience of the blessings and the challenges that come with that.

So, I don't think, you know, I think being a movement parent is also probably a whole experience that I don't know as someone who is not a parent but I think that that's the comment that I want to make about, you know, Wages for Housework, again, has taught me how to think about that.

Alissa Trotz: Thank you so much Chanda, you will make us all cry today, because I think you're putting really important, and hard questions on the table. You know, say for those of us, for example, who are in the academy, which is where this is being held, it has been in Women and Gender Studies, such an honor to ensure that our intro students have been exposed to the work of Selma and Margaret. You know, one year I remember students had a question about article 88 and the Venezuelan constitution I emailed Selma and she wrote back, and the students were just thrilled. But I also think what you're saying there about family really reminds us, you know, it's about our responsibility or accountability and humility right, in terms of the folks who are out there beating the pavement doing the work, and could be doing all of these other things as well and make choices, and what does it mean for us? What responsibility does it call forth from us?

We have so many comments coming in, I'm just going to ask one question and then try to go to the audience comments and that question is, because I think it's a really important one and Selma really flagged that we wanted to get to this, this is the question of autonomy, and I think it's really key because you can't talk about solidarity, and you can't talk about difference in power without talking about autonomy. So, for all of you, Margaret and Selma firstly, autonomy is key to Wages for Housework and the Global Strike. Can you explain for the audience what does autonomy mean for the movement work that you have been engaged in for decades? How does autonomy, enable movements to challenge hierarchies of power and differences, differences that are the result of inequalities? Why is autonomy and separatism not the same, why should we not confuse the two? And organizationally, you know because you have students who are reading these things always in class, but how does it actually work organizationally?

Chanda, for you, you know I'm reading a comment in the chat folks who have questions or comments you want everyone to see please put them in the Q and A because if you put them into the chat it only comes to the hosts and panelists, but Benita Lawrence who's an incredible indigenous scholar at York University and was involved in Wages for Housework, way back when, has a really poignant comment for us in there, talking about the importance of addressing caring and unwaged work but a side comment about the fact that she began in the sciences, before moving into social sciences and into Indigenous Studies and she references the work she did not do in this struggle to survive in sciences, which sort of reminds us Chanda, in your book about, in some ways how lonely, the

work must be as a, you know, black, queer, a-gender theoretical physicist. So, what does autonomy mean to you? Because who are the folks, where do you find communities of solidarity to address the kinds of specific issues if there's, like, only two other black feminist physicists, like where the hell do you go to have that conversation to come back to make the kinds of challenges that you do?

Selma James: Can I say, Can I begin by saying there is no unity, without autonomy, because autonomy begins with each individual sector, making its own autonomous case, in a way, which makes them also accountable to other sectors that is you want not divided by your uniqueness you are united by what your uniqueness brings to the struggle of all over the rest of us. We have, we began with the autonomy of lesbian women within the Wages for Housework campaign. They were accountable to everybody else in the campaign, but everybody in the campaign was accountable to them that then became Black Women for Wages for Housework, another organization within the campaign, which was accountable to the campaign but everybody in the campaign was also accountable to women of color which is what they call themselves now, Women of Color, in the Global Women's Strike, and that went on with sex workers with those of us, all of us, who are people with disabilities, you know my hearing is bad. I have a right to make my case for hearing, but I have a responsibility to be accountable to others who are in wheelchairs, who are people of color who are being deported, who are fighting military dictatorships. I must be accountable to others, and I must expect and hope, and encourage others to be accountable to my sector as well.

That is not separatism because separatism turns its back on other sectors, even those that want to support you, we don't turn our back on support. We are accountable to others, and we expect and hope, and encourage people to be accountable to us, the same thing is true with women and men. That's why we have a group of men of pay day, which is accountable to the women, and we are also accountable to them. That's why we don't suffer from sexism within the Wages for Housework campaign, which has become the Global Women's Strike, but I think it's really crucial that this accountability, really works on an international level. We work with the Korean women who are organizing the defense of people who are running from the bombs of the military, and we support what they do. We work with the women in Thailand, who are trying to save regenerate the soil and keep the soil and stop the mining and regenerate the soil around the mines and keep the trees, and who are sex workers, and who, some of whom, are workers in the sweatshops. We have relationships with women in India who are farm workers and who have just gained about 100 of them, [muffled] women who are getting land for themselves.

There is a great movement of women in Andhra Pradesh, a million women are doing another kind of farming, natural farming, which has the possibility first of all, of keeping the children, healthy and keeping us all healthy, but also being able to reverse or at least to stop global

warming and maybe even reverse it and we were doing support work for them, and they want to reach these people who are in struggle. They want the support they don't turn their nose up at support and they are aware of the work that we do, they're aware of the care income, which we are fighting for which they can see the value of because they are doing work on the land without payment to save it and we are saying, they have a right to an income for the work that they, and we are doing. The same thing applies to women in a number of countries in Africa who are fighting for the end of the privatization of their land for cash crops, when they want to be able to grow their own food and feed their own children.

We know about the struggle for the environment if we are women. We know struggling for our children's health. We are the protectors of the children against racism, against pollution, against injustice. We are justice workers. We do justice work if we are unwaged housewives, carers, grandmothers, we fight the pipeline's, there are all kinds of struggles that we are involved in as women, as autonomous women, bringing the men along, bringing the community along, strengthening their right to a life and strengthening their organization, and the autonomy enables, that kind of support of mutual support and advertising, of our struggles and what we have been able to win and what we hope to win, and how we can work together on an international level despite differences of language of culture, and historical background. There is no other way to do it. You know, you look at the movements today and the ones, like the Indian strike of millions, they come together, they haven't lost their religion they have responded to the religion of others as part of what the community on strike for a year, and going back on strike on the 23rd and 24th of February, they have autonomy, they have the right to their religion, and they have the right to defend others. That's what we want. That's what works. That's what has kept us going for almost 50 years.

Margaret Prescod: Yeah, thank you so much Selma. I'm not sure, Alissa, or one of you, to give us, should I weigh in on that or do we want to go on to the next question, I'm looking at the clock.

Alissa Trotz: I think they're all sort of being answered because the question was about autonomy and Selma started answering and has answered it in a way that has opened up to answer a question posed by Kerry asking what does a people centered economy and society look like. So, I think for both of you to jump in on either of those points or questions would be fine and then we're probably going to go to one or two more questions. I'm going to put a link in the chat because Selma is so wide ranging it's incredible and a former professor here, who left the academy Sarah Abraham, used to be in the sociology department, has just published three wonderful interviews, including with women, talking about this strike in India in Against the Current, which is an online magazine that she's on the editorial board of.

So, I'm going to post that link for folks to read up on that. It's pretty incredible. But I think, Margaret if you and Chanda can answer this, because it's

you know it's answering Caroline's questions as well, we'll go to one or two more questions.

Margaret Prescod: Right, well as in my journalist work, I'm always telling people answer the question. One thing I do want to comment though on autonomy, picking up on something Selma said then I will go to that which is it was really the possibility of autonomy that brought me, as a woman, a black woman of African Caribbean descent, into the campaign. The fact that Selma wrote Sex, Race and Class you know a lot of people use the term intersectionality, I don't know too many grassroots women that I work with at the base that taught like that intersectionality, but the title of Selma's book Sex, Race and Class, what do you call that? you call that intersectional? Also, in the study group that I was in with Andayie, your mentor, Audre Lorde, was part of a study group with us for a period of time and actually she was a big supporter, she was part of the first, or maybe the second Black Women for Wages for Housework in New York. We would have conversation about how as a black woman, as an immigrant, as a lesbian, as low income, whatever, that we are all of it and we can't cut off part of ourselves for the other. What do you call that? Intersectionality. We didn't come up with that term, but all I'm saying this is something that we have known and we have talked about for a very long time.

Selma also talked about accountability. And I also want to mention that in terms of the movement now, because a lot of people have trouble with exactly what that means, especially what it means in relation to race. There's practically nothing in the United States, I don't know about Canada I suspect it is true there as well, that isn't viewed from the lens of race, and you have a lot of very well-meaning, white people or not people of color, who haven't had the training that we have had, we have been fortunate to have, in the Global Women's Strike on Race, so they have no idea about accountability, they have no idea that it's important to find out what the black women say, what do the indigenous women think, when they're coming up with a particular strategy or tactic they feel they could go ahead and develop it without discussing it or any input from us. And that's supposed to be perfectly reasonable, I'm not gonna say any more about it than that.

But I also want to, you know, I just want to underscore that point for people who are out there, there's a reason for autonomy, it doesn't mean that every person of color, every black person, is somebody who may not be on the other side. We just have to look at what is happening in Haiti, and I want to really lift up Haiti, Pierre Laboissiere from Haiti Action Committee, a great, great Haitian leader was on the call I'm not sure he was able to stay because he's always up to his eyeballs with the movement on the ground and the demands there. You know, we all owe great debt to Haiti, Paved the way for the whole emancipation, the ending of slavery and the whole of the Americans. When Latin America, Bolîvar, was fighting for the liberation of Latin America, after the Haitian Revolution, Haiti gave refuge to Bolîvar they sent ships, they sent fighters, even the great expansion of the United States would

not have happened without Haiti. There is a reason that Haiti has been so maligned, has been so kept down, and the Haitian people who have a revolutionary tradition, who are saying today, we are trying to complete our revolution that they began in 1804, from the Baza revolution in 1816, to the revolutions that spread in Grenada and throughout the Caribbean region in the United States and New Orleans etc. Haitians inspired and are very involved with that. There's a lot more I could say about Haiti, but I won't now, but hopefully we can put some things in the links for people who want to support the grassroots in Haiti of some of the things that they can do. So, a lot of us are very, very committed to that struggle in Haiti and want to be accountable to that struggle in Haiti. I got so involved with that other side. Alissa, I forgot the other part of your question. I beg your pardon there.

Alissa Trotz: No, it's great, the big question was around autonomy and so you, so you've actually answered that and then it was followed up by a question in the chat by Caroline Hossein on a people centered economy, and you sort of answered that by referring to the long struggle and the debt that we all, the debt that we all ow to Haiti.

Margaret Prescod: Yeah, and the Black Lives Matter movement, a lot of people got really confused about that, because people started mixing up autonomy and the separatism and not getting the point that the Black Lives Matter movement is saying, “If Black Lives don't count the lives of none of us counts.” So we have to keep our eyes open in front of us and behind us to know who's using race to pimp off the movement, who's using race to just put themselves forward, or who are really about building from an autonomous base, which by the way Malcolm X did, once he dropped his separatism, he came back from Mecca and said he's ready to work with everybody who is for human rights but he did it from an autonomous base and I think we have to wrap our heads around what that means and I think I'll just leave it at that and maybe go on to hear what Chanda has to say.

Alissa Trotz: Yeah, I wonder if we could, yeah, indeed, and, you know, again, there's so many questions coming in, we're probably going to have to go to one question before we close, this could go on forever, and just I just wanted to shout out that Margaret Busbee, who is in the house who was, you know, the editor of most recently New Daughters of Africa and I think was one of the youngest and first black female publishers in the UK with Allison and Busby, we have, you know, Gail Lewis in the house it's just remarkable the audience that's here today. Chanda, I wondered if you could comment on this question of autonomy and on what it means to build a community in science and there's a question from Donna Barnett who sort of wondered if you could reflect on this as well within the context of some of the you know the work and in your book and I suppose the chapter in particular, on the physics of melanin. So, I wondered if there's a way that we could try to figure out how to tie all of that together and then we'll go to this last question about the Academy.

Chanda Prescod-Weinstein: Yeah, I think unfortunately there probably isn't a way for me to pull the physics of melanin into that so I'm sorry that I won't be able to get to that question. But I think that this question about autonomy and organizing within the academy is a very important one, particularly because of the dynamics that arise between organizing communities and the academy which can be very predatory. I think that there's a real problem with predatory relationships between the academy and organizers in particular. There is also this question of what happens when you are, you know, how I'm often termed a barrier breaker. I'm the first black woman in North America to hold a tenure track faculty position in theoretical cosmology and in particle theory, in either of those topics. Which means that in a lot of ways, as you said Alissa, I am an isolated person in a particular way. And there are different ways of getting along when you are isolated in that way.

So, one of the ways that I have seen senior women and gender minorities, but broadly senior white women get along is by being as awful as the old boys club. And that is, and I've also seen women of my generation, who get along by being as awful as the old boys club, and that is one way that people particularly people who don't have a political analysis, who, you know, didn't grow up in Wages for Housework campaign etc. or who grew up in an environment where their social training actively teaches them that solidarity is a bad thing, they don't have any way of thinking about power relations, other than to try and cleave to the most powerful and perform fealty to that power.

So, that challenge is put before us, as, as black women, as people of color, as gender minorities, the different ways that we are marginalized, which is do we, as much as we physically can, and that varies person to person, try to fit in, or you know, what else do we do with ourselves when we find that we're the only ones in the room? And so, you know, I think that there are a couple of answers, which, it's important for us to continuously work to engage and produce good relations with people who are doing grassroots work and that is not something that's just going to fall in your lap. You have to go out and be responsible to the communities that you are in. Literally geographically that can also, in my case, like I talked about the work that I have done supporting Keyahi, around Mauna Kea, to stay engaged with people outside of the academy who are among the grassroots.

I think the other thing is that you cannot use identity as a simple marker for where you can do political building and so I just want to name for example, Brian Shovey, who’s in the audience, who's a gay. white male. theoretical physicist also University of Toronto alumni, he’s a member of Particles for Justice with me, we're a multiracial, mostly white, but multiracial, multinational group of people, and some of us were raised as radicals, identify as like anarchists’ other people are like very comfortable working within the Democratic Party. At the same time we have found a way to work with each other across different sets of values but at the

same time to focus on values that we do share. I see Shayda, who is a professor at Carleton University, one of our multinational members is also in the audience.

So, I think that it's important to find your people and understand that your people may not look like what you think they are going to look like. And so autonomy and solidarity is also going to, and I think this is something that I really I heard autonomy a lot as a kid, It was a big word that I learned early on, but that dynamic of finding your people who are willing to be in solidarity with you, and I want to give a specific example also of Brian Nord who's another black theoretical cosmologist, that Brian, as a man, has been given the option of fitting in with the old boys club in the black physics community and has repeatedly turned down that social location, out of solidarity with me. So those are choices that we are all allowed to make along the way, and I think are totally aligned with, I really want to encourage particularly the young folks who are thinking about organizing to pay attention to what Selma about autonomy and how autonomy is not a strategy for division, but it is a strategy for autonomy, for solidarity. Autonomy is a strategy for solidarity, and we can construct that in different ways.

So, I think for people who are thinking about, should I pick up Our Time is Now, or Sex, Race and Class, the previous collection, pick it up for that reason alone, so you can understand that organizing theory. There's lots of other great stuff but that one thing alone by itself makes it worth it.

Alissa Trotz: Thank you so much, Chanda.

Selma James: I wanted to say one thing, I'm so delighted with what my granddaughter said about autonomy is, but she said solidarity, why I use the word unity, Chanda, rather than solidarity, is because people send you a message of solidarity and go about their business. I know you didn't mean that, but we have to be careful about that. We want to be involved in the people, with the people, who are doing other struggles because they are telling us what we should think they're marching our view, and they're widening the movement, I must refer to what I said earlier, C.L.R. James started an organization, so that the third layer would be directing it, maybe not in the leadership, but nevertheless directing it, because what we think and what we are involved in and what our struggle is precisely what must be the cutting edge of the movement we are part of and Margaret makes this terrific point against separatism.

We form movements that base themselves on what we do, or who we are, or what our particular struggle is, fine, but all the classes are in that movement, and we fight the class struggle within those movements. And Margaret has been one of the best people we have to fight that kind of struggle not only against racism, but against class. The, the imposition of a higher sector of the class against the lowest sector we start at the bottom, we don't want to bottom in the society, we all move up or we're not getting anywhere.

Margaret Prescod: Yeah, Selma, I have to say that also I think that without unity there really is

no solidarity. So, I think I know we talked about, we say, even in the survey talk about solidarity with Haiti, etc etc. we know very well what we mean. So, I think we have to look at the word within that context in terms of unity and solidarity.

Selma James: Yes, and autonomy allows us to see those in struggle who are hidden from us.
I want to give one particular example, there are many, and that is women in Palestine. If they were not fighting to keep, to stay, in Palestine despite all that Israel is throwing at them, we would lose that battle, but women in Palestine have been extraordinary in making life despite the Israelis attempt to shut life down where they are concerned. So, and that's what women are doing in a lot of places in the world.

And Margaret knows, absolutely, even better than I, the women in Haiti, and how they are making a life when they never intended to give us any life at all. They were furious, the powers that be are furious, that Haitians have taken their autonomy and refuse to give it up.

Margaret Prescod: Yeah, and I know we want to go on to the next question. This is really such a vital discussion because what I meant to say earlier, and I want to pick up on the points, Chanda made, about our people don't necessarily look like us in relation to Haiti. If we look at a Baby Doc, a dark-skinned black man, if we look at the thief that well was, was killed by God knows who, Jovenel Moïse, recently in Haiti, another black man. We can't assume that because somebody looks like us, that they are people. So, I wanted to underscore that point, as we're looking to build unity, we call it unity, we call it solidarity. I think we have to keep that in mind and sometimes it confuses us and that's why they get confused with separatism and autonomy, because it's like we can't work with people who don't look like us, right, they want to have nothing to do with white people or indigenous people or whatever, we have to be only in our own community with people who look exactly like us. It's not like that, that is not autonomy, that is separatism that's not about building unity, building solidarity, I just wanted to underscore that, thank you.

Alissa Trotz: That's wonderful. We can listen to you all day and Selma, I'm just reminded of how much I love you guys this is incredible. I'm going to ask folks, we still have over 200 folks here, I'm going to ask one sort of final question and really just ask folks to stay with us to the end in tribute to this remarkable panel, and to the elder, Selma, who is up past nine in London and is still here with us and Nina, Selma’s partner, please show yourself Nina, who is sitting there and I really need to say that you know Nina is a joint coordinator of the Global Women's Strike and the founder of Legal Action for Women an activist and herself and author of several volumes, including the Milk of Human Kindness and Creating a Caring Economy that charts the work of Nora Castañeda and the Women's Development Bank of Venezuela under the Bolivarian Revolution, so thank you Nina so much for being here, solidity with all of the others.

This last question I'm going to put to the three of you, again Selma and Margaret and slightly differently for Chanda. Selma I was listening to an interview of yours last night with Siddharth Battier from The Wire, in which you defined yourself as a working-class woman with a secondary education, who was accepted at a university, but decided not to go because quote I thought it would ruin my mind end quote. To both you and Margaret, where and when do you choose to engage with academics, or not, Selma, you talk about ambition being the enemy of any movement and that applies so much to this world we live that Chanda could speak about, when and where do you choose to engage with academics in the work that you do. What are you looking for and what are you looking to avoid?

Let me just ask Chanda, Donna Barnett has put several questions here, loves the cover of your book, and keeps wanting to hear how cosmology relates to this question of organizing of justice says it is within this space of finding your people that particles vibrate and are drawn to each other on an energetic level. So, I wondered if in your reflection on your role as a scientist in the academy, as you define yourself as a black gender feminist physicist who is rethinking what you want science to do in the world, if you could speak a bit about, you know, you have this incredible section in your book where you say it's not just about the Milky Way or the nighttime sky, it's about what are the conditions that our communities need to be able to see the Milky Way to be able to see the nighttime sky, to be able to experience the ocean and I wondered if you could reflect on that, and your responsibility as a non-untenured scientist, right, and I'm so glad that you called out Uahikea Maile who has done such incredible activist work on this campus, an untenured Indigenous colleague in the Department of Political Science, if you could perhaps reflect on that. So we'll go to, I guess, Margaret, Selma, in whatever order all three of you to help close out this remarkable afternoon.

Selma James: I wanted to refer to Ireland. And I know Maggie Ronayne is our point of reference in Ireland, and she works in the academy, what you call the Academy, in a university. She not only has helped to fight against the Ilisu Dam in Turkey with her academic work but also, she has completely undermined the hierarchy in her university, where women were taught, were called teachers when they were lecturers so they could get less money, where the cleaners were divided by race, where there was discrimination because of caring work and she made it clear and has fought a struggle with many women at the university to break the divisions among the different layers of women, so that they are not, any of them, punished because they do caring work and therefore, are not accessible to the university in the way that the university would like us as slaves. Okay? We want information. We want you to present our struggles to spread our struggles, we need to know about them you know about them often when we don't because you move in areas where you can know. We must know what other women and men are doing in other places and you have to report them to us but we don't want you to take those struggles, to build a career on it, and not even let

us know what's going on, or use them as if you discovered the struggle, the ideas and the perspective that the struggle fought very hard to find and to publicize and to use in their own struggle. We are very concerned.

You know, the English Collective of Prostitutes did a whole project with a number of academics who were ready to present their views about it, we didn't want their views about sex work. Sex workers have their views about sex work, and we wanted those to be presented and we wanted this struggle presented and she absolutely refused to accept their work unless the terms were clear that they were to be respectful of what they were reporting and report accurately what the struggle was about. We welcome, academics, Maggie is a very welcome member, you know we love her. She does the work of the campaign within academia and takes a lot of guff as a result of it because they don't like at all, that this woman is not worried about her career but the first thing she's worried about is that the women are not getting the rights, or the wages that they're entitled to and that their caring work is not being acknowledged as part of the work that they must do. We have workers in our network who are domestic workers, who, the academia is ready to take the work that they do and the struggle that they have made as part of what will enhance their career but they're not ready to work with them, and for them in order to get the domestic workers the information and the power that they are entitled to have. When they find those academic, they welcome them but otherwise they feel [muffled] off, they feel that they are helping somebody to get a career but they're not helping their struggle. And we want our struggle represented, but we want your struggle to be represented and if they don't want to publish what we collectively want, we'd like to support your struggle to see that it's published and to see that you get what you are entitled to as part of the working class.

Margaret Prescod: Yeah, to pick up on that, one of the things we were doing at the start of Black Women for Wages for Housework we were all in an academy. We were at Queens College at the City University of New York, Andaiye was there, you know, so many of us were there from Africa from the Caribbean region, people who wanted to go back, which Andaiye did do, to Guyana. Early on, in Black Women for Wages for Housework, in some of the early writings we did, we were concerned about the division between the academy and the community, and that the resources of the academy, be made available to those of us, you know, in the community because there are a lot of struggles, as Chanda and Selma, said that happens in the community that are vital for those in the academy to know about. Now, I happen to think that we can find our people, except your like in the 1%, I'm assuming that every profession, whether it's in sport, it's in the academy, it's in the political class, there are going to be people who are against our movement. And part of what we do, in a very practical way, because we want to win, we want to find our people so that we're able to bring people together, so that together we can get what it is, the resources, the knowledge, the research, etc. that we need. And that's an approach that I have found useful that in early

Black Women for Wages for Housework we were working on, we continue to work on.

We understand what Selma has pointed out, because, even if you look at history, so much of working class history, if you want to use that word, so much of women's history, so much of people, academics, some academics are now doing increasing research during the slave trade of the women being used as breeders for example, there's a lot of useful work that is going on and I think that that, you know, the challenge that we have to face, and crossing the divides like crossing any divide is crossing that academic and community divide and really finding people that we could work with so that we can move forward and we can win. We want to be able to bring people together, we want to bring people together who are like minded, who share our goals, who aren't there just for housework, who are anti-capitalist and who are ready to do the work that we want to do what we don't want to happen is like what Chanda referred to as somebody running around saying “Wages for Housework in the academy ended in 1977” and people really not challenging it. That's the kind of people in the academy that we rarely have issues with but I you know cover, quite a lot. The work that students are doing on the justice for janitors, the hunger strikes that have gone on, within the academy of people standing with Selma’s views, Ireland as an example. That is one example. There have been examples, numerous examples of that happening on campuses across the United States. And I think we also have to recognize that as well.

So, my approach and I think the approach would be is, as Selma said, we welcome people in the academy who are on our side, we know that we have to find a way for resources at the academy to be a value and useful to people within the community, and also vice versa. You know we have to also inform each other. So I'll just really leave it at that. Thank you.

Alissa Trotz: Mm hmm. And Chanda?

Chanda Prescod-Weinstein: Yeah, I just have a really quick response, which is to say that we’re often told that it is not possible to bridge that divide, that my mom was just talking about. That you know, if you're on one side of it or the other, that you're doing one thing or another. And, you know, since the theme here was generations, I just really want to acknowledge that my mother's the person who taught me to think past the boundaries that were set up for me. That I was told that I could only be one thing one way and my mother and both of my grandmother's, but I particularly want to acknowledge my grandmother Elsa also because she can't be here and taught me to think past the borders that exists between us, that are erected between us and around us. So, the idea that I couldn't be an academic and an organizer at the same time just never occurred to me, my understanding was that I was going to have to do both. And am I perfect at it? No, but I do feel that I'm doing it and I hope that I'm setting some kind of example so that other people feel that there are other options available to them as well and that we can build a world where we are in good relations with each other.

Just to go to the one question that I won't have time to answer. I think without that motivation from my mom, who first told me that we need people who are teaching us about the universe beyond the terrible things that are happening to us, this is one of the epigraphs of the book I'm paraphrasing badly.

When we think about what it would take to ensure that every child has access to the experience of wondering over the night sky it requires a radical revision of how resources are distributed in our society, how power is distributed in our society. It requires us to think about wages for housework and mass incarceration and how to end that and the end of colonialism and in some ways, as some people might say, the end of the world. So I really want to acknowledge, you know, my mom and Selma as two theorists who taught me to think beyond those traditional boundaries.

Alissa Trotz: Thank you so much. I'm going to give Selma the last word because I think she was coming in after Margaret spoke and then we will just bring this incredible evening to a close.

Selma James: I do want to have one word, first of all, that what women do is to reverse the capitalist perspective, which is profit. We save people, we save the natural world, and we follow that through with work that we do, and that we are dedicated to, and that we want society to accept as its perspective. This is why we offer a care income, because we want the work of reproduction to be the central focus of the society, that's anti-capitalist. On the question of academia, I have to add Darlene Lawrence defending and advertising, the struggle of indigenous people. She has done a very good job and she writes brilliantly. And I do want to say that indigenous people everywhere are an important part of what needs to happen to save the planet because they've been there first, in terms of what they do and how they begin with life, and they begin with the support and care and protection of life. And that's what we all have to do in order to save the planet.

And, um, I wanted to say one final word about my son. He's done very well in the sense that he spent years fighting alongside other workers as a trade unionist trying to fight against the constraints of the trade union, very similar to the academic constraints, where you don't allow the grassroots to take the lead and to make the framework of your perspective, and your struggle, and he's done that with us and for us and I think that Chanda, you did some, used to do, physics with him I think, and mathematics, two scientists together from time to time. I wanted to say that he has played a role, certainly in my life, and I think in all our lives, and does fantastic work now.

Alissa Trotz: Thank you, Selma. Chanda, Selma, Margaret, this has been remarkable. I think we're all truly humbled and grateful and on a personal note, it was so amazing to meet you today, Chanda. Selma and Margaret, I'm so grateful to be in continuous conversation and learning so much from you. I want to just close with two quotes before turning over to Kerry to bring it to a close. The first comes from Gail

Lewis, who is actually on the call today and has put this note in the chat that I want to read to you. Hearing these stories from a family of activists we have no clearer example of how our politics and activism has love at its core. Not just opposition, but generated from, and the generative of love, even as it exposes all the power relations and their manifestation in different sites, locations, formations. Thank you, Selma. Thank you, Margaret. Thank you, Chanda. And I want to close with a few sentences from Selma's Sex, Race and Class, her final chapter Striving for Clarity and Influence, both of which were on such display today, an essay on the political legacy of C.L.R. James 2001-2012.

Politics, if it is fueled by a great will to change the world, rather than by personal ambition, offers a chance to know the world and to be more self-conscious of the actual life you are living rather than being taken over by what you are told you should feel about yourself and others. A chance, in other words, to live an authentic life. Such politics are a unique enrichment, not a sacrifice.

For the example that all three of you have model today, and Chanda, as the daughter and granddaughter, the incredible sort of example that you have offered of how you have learnt from Selma and Margaret and then Selma and Margaret talking about what they've learned from you, has been a real inspiration to us, thank you so, so much and I will just turn it back over to Kerry.

Kerry Rittich: Selma, Margaret, Chanda, this has been a breathtaking, exhilarating conversation far beyond I think what we could ever have imagined or hoped for. I know I speak for everyone, not only in Toronto, but everyone in the wide world of the audience who is here today, and I know that because I am reading their comments, that they have found this conversation needed, critical, and as energizing and brilliant as we have. So, with the greatest, greatest, greatest of thanks, you have performed the work of unity, of family, of politics in the most extraordinary way. We're out of words. So, it remains for me to thank you once again and to thank also are tremendous technical support Natalya and Jo behind the scenes. And we would like to invite every single one of you to the next Research Seminar which happens to take place one week from today at 4pm, Eastern Standard Time.