

Weeksville Weekends

**STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL:
BLACK FEMINIST MANIFESTOS**

Saturday, March 13, 2021

1:00 - 4:00 pm

Weeksville Heritage Center

An online public program at

www.weeksvillesociety.org

Event Link

<https://zoom.us/j/94372034172?pwd=ckxZYldZRWliYmFhRVMwOU9Gdy9jZz09>

WEEKSVILLE HERITAGE CENTER

Our Mission

Weeksville Heritage Center is an historic house museum, site and cultural center in Central Brooklyn that uses historic preservation, education, arts and a social justice lens to preserve, document, and inspire engagement with the history of Weeksville, one of the largest free Black communities in pre-Civil War America.

Our Vision

To be a leading authority and resource for the scholarship, exploration and dissemination of the history of Weeksville and other 19th-and early-20th century free Black communities, as well as the modern-day artistic, intellectual and social justice imperatives they exemplify and inspire. Our work illuminates a pivotal aspect of Black history; empowers our visitors with tools, training and education; celebrates and centers Black culture, community and creativity; and sparks dialogue and collaborations between local residents, artists, academics and activists that advance us towards a more just and equitable world.

STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL: BLACK FEMINIST MANIFESTOS

Strategies for Survival is an online public program engaging with a series of historical and contemporary manifestos resonant with the explosive reality we experience now. Written by Black feminist artists, activists, and writers and performed by Weeksville community members, these texts point to circumstances that are unacceptable and in need of change. But most importantly, they propose pathways to move forward in order to overcome the status quo and create new realities. In the midst of political uncertainty and a physically isolating pandemic, these statements offer visions that can help us connect with one another and transcend what often feels like a never-ending crisis.

Starting at 1 pm on Saturday, a diverse group of women from Weeksville's community—students, activists, writers, business owners, and educators—will be reading and performing a manifesto of their choice. These women will be embodying the texts in spaces that have been significant to them during this last year. A cozy kitchen, a neighborhood café, an improvised home office, and a Montessori School, among others, will connect the content of the texts to the performers' daily lives. During the course of one hour, nine women will enact these manifestos and livestream themselves, linking their physical stages to the viewer's homes.

At 2 pm, we will discuss the conditions from which the texts emerged and how they can catalyze new forms of cooperation and collective action. Along with feminist scholars and cultural workers, we will explore ideas gleaned from the documents and talk about Afrofuturism, Black poetry, and change-making. Additionally, women who enacted the manifestos will be sharing their experiences of working with the perspectives and emotions contained in those words.

In the second part of the event, at 3 pm, attendees can partake in a workshop to acknowledge the radical possibilities of their everyday experiences by creating collective texts and bibliographies. We will encourage participants to pay special attention to the intellectual contributions of their elders and ancestors in their own citational practices. This exercise will be done using the open-source platform Zotero.

SCHEDULE AND PARTICIPANTS

Part 1

1 pm - 2 pm, Manifesto readings and performances

- **Marguerite Thompson**
A Weeksville Woman Speaks by Marguerite Thompson, 2020
- **Anika Paris**
Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto by Martine Syms, 2013
- **Cassandra Davilmar**
Women's Declaration of Food Sovereignty by Nyéléni, 2007
- **Nina Pluviose**
Lilies of the Valley Unite or Not by Lily Bea Moore, 1998
- **Paige Wint**
An African American Manifesto on Education by Rose Sanders, 1994
- **Ebony Noelle Golden**
Definition of a Womanist by Alice Walker, 1983
- **Danielle Moulton**
A Litany for Survival by Audre Lorde, 1978
- **Adina English**
Statement of Purpose by The National Black Feminist Organization 1973
- **Sacha Telfer**
Against Liberals by Dana Densmore, 1968

2 pm - 3 pm, Conversation with guest speakers and performers

Guest Speakers

- **OlaRonke Akinmowo**, artist, scholar, cultural worker, founder of The Free Black Women's Library
- **Aiesha Turman**, founder of The Black Girl Project
- Moderated by **Gabriela López Dena**, program curator

Part 2

3 pm - 4 pm, *Honoring the Ancestors: Black Feminist Citational Praxis*, interactive workshop

Facilitators

- **Zakiya Collier**, Project Archivist, Weeksville Heritage Center
- **Brendane Tynes**, Co-host, Zora's Daughters Podcast
- **Alyssa A.L. James**, Co-host, Zora's Daughters Podcast

EXCERPTS OF FEATURED MANIFESTOS AND TEXTS

A Weeksville Woman Speaks

Marguerite Thompson, 2020

I am a woman
A mother
A daughter
A sister
A grandmother
A cousin
A friend
I am a black Woman today. ¹

Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto

Martine Syms, 2013

The Mundane Afrofuturists promise.

To produce a collection of Mundane Afrofuturist literature that follows these rules:

1. No interstellar travel—travel is limited to within the solar system and is difficult, time-consuming, and expensive.
2. No inexplicable end to racism—dismantling white supremacy would be complex, violent, and have a global impact.
3. No aliens unless the connection is distant, difficult, tenuous, and expensive—and they have no interstellar travel either.
4. No internment camps for blacks, aliens, or black aliens.
5. No Martians, Venusians, etc.
6. No forgetting about political, racial, social, economic, and geographic struggles.
7. No alternative universes.
8. No revisionist history.
9. No magic or supernatural elements.
10. No Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, or Bucks. 5/6
11. No time travel or teleportation.
12. No Mammies, Jezebels, or Sapphires.
13. Not to let Mundane Afrofuturism cramp their style, as if it could.
14. To burn this manifesto as soon as it gets boring. ²

Women's Declaration of Food Sovereignty

Néyeléni, 2007

We want to see food and agriculture taken out of the World Trade Organization and out of free trade agreements. What is more, we reject the capitalist and patriarchal institutions that see food, water, land, and traditional knowledge, as well as women's bodies, as mere commodities. ³

LILIES OF THE VALLEY UNITE!

or not

Lily Bea Moore, 1998

I Take a pointer
touch an object
and say
“There
I proclaim you art”
As a Queen
Wood say to a Night

Problem is no
Body Recognizes
This Process
“Of” Art
There is no
Stamina involved
Thinking Time
is Mini-mal
Hands—on
Barely ⁴

An African American Manifesto on Education

Rose Sanders, 1994

We reaffirm our belief in the genius of our children and their boundless ability to create, invent and change the course of history and the universe.

We reject all notions or beliefs that our children are inferior and unable to learn at high levels.

We acknowledge the gains we have made in removing the colored only signs from water fountains, the buses and school buildings; and we give praise to those who prayed, marched, suffered and died to kill the spirit and letter of the Plessy decision.

We make known that our children are at risk because of denied opportunity, not denied ability, and we absolutely reject notions or practices that treat them like inferior beings.

We also make known that the glaring disparate numbers of blacks in low levels, vocational, special education; and whites in preparatory, gifted, and college preparatory, attest to racism in our system, not the shallowness of their genes.

In memory of Carter G. Woodson, the founder of Black History Week, we reject the inferior status this nation has relegated our children to 100 years, and we will no longer silently accept unequal schools, unequal resources and unequal taxation and unequal exposure to our history and culture.

We will raise our expectations for them as high as the stars and as wide as the ocean.⁵

Definition of a Womanist

Alice Walker, 1983

2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?" Ans. "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."⁶

A Litany for Survival

by Audre Lorde, 1978

and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.⁷

TEXTS FEATURED IN THE CONVERSATION

Against Liberals

Dana Desmore, 1978

So liberal men are very big on rights for women, within limits. They should be educated, have jobs or even careers when it doesn't interfere with the family be knowledgeable and articulate, just so that it is all tempered by womanly charm and a care for her appearance.

Of course, as soon as you get down to the specifics, all the old prejudices come in. "I wouldn't hire a woman to carry acid, of course, because they're too emotional and might lose their heads in a crisis." But in general, you are safe from the boorish lower class statements like "I'm glad my daughter isn't neurotic enough to want to be a doctor."⁸

Statement of Purpose

The National Black Feminist Organization, 1973

Black women want to be proud, dignified, and free from all those false definitions of beauty and womanhood that are unrealistic and unnatural. *We*, not white men or black men, must define our own self-image as black women and not fall into the mistake of being placed upon the pedestal which is even being rejected by white women. It has been hard for black women to emerge from the myriad of distorted images that have portrayed us as grinning Beulahs, castrating Sapphires, and pancake-box Jemimas.⁹

A Knowing So Deep

Toni Morrison, 1985

I think about us, black women, a lot. How many of us are battered and how many are champions. I note the strides that have replaced the tiptoe; I watch the new configurations we have given to personal relationships, wonder what shapes are forged and what is merely bent. I think about the sisters no longer with us, who, in rage or contentment, left us to finish what should never have begun: a gender/racial war in which everybody would lose, if we lost, and in which everybody would win, if we won. I think about the Black women who never landed who are still swimming open-eyed in the sea. I think about those of us who did land and see how their strategies for survival became our maneuvers for power.

I know the achievements of the past are staggering in their everydayness as well as their singularity. I know the work undone is equally staggering, for it is nothing less than to alter the world in each of its parts: the distribution of money, the management of resources, the way families are nurtured, the way work is accomplished and valued, the penetration of the network that connects these parts.¹⁰

The Mission of the Flowers

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, 1869

But an important lesson had been taught; she had learned to respect the individuality of her sister flowers, and had begun to see that they, as well as herself, had their own missions,—some to gladden the eye with their loveliness and thrill the soul with delight; some to transmit fragrance to the air; others to breathe a refining influence upon the world; some had power to lull the aching brow and soothe the weary heart and brain into forgetfulness; and of those whose mission she did not understand, she wisely concluded there must be some object in their creation, and resolved to be true to her own earth-mission and lay her fairest buds and flowers upon the altars of love and truth.¹¹

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RESOURCES

The Black Girl Project

<http://aieshaturman.com/the-bgp/>

The Black Girl Project is a grassroots organization that leverages both traditional and new educational formats and media platforms to assist young women and girls in attaining personal freedom, liberation, and self-actualization. They do this via a multi-pronged approach, utilizing interdisciplinary artistic modalities, primarily Media and Literary Arts, to engage their core audience in creating, remixing, and narrating their own lives. Through on-site workshops and labs, as well as their annual Sisterhood Summit that serves 150+ women and girls from the Metro NY, and Mid-Atlantic regions, they use the arts to empower, transform, and mitigate intergenerational trauma and cultural/historical grief.

The Free Black Women's Library

<https://www.thefreeblackwomenslibrary.com/>

The Free Black Women's Library is a social art project, interactive installation and book collection that celebrates the brilliance, diversity and imagination of Black women writers. We are currently raising money for a Reading Room, Bookmobile and Staff person for the library.

Please show this project your love with a donation and a share of the [GoFundMe](#) link.

Zora's Daughters

<https://zorasdaughters.com/>

Zora's Daughters is a society and culture podcast that uses Black feminist anthropology to think about race, politics, and popular culture.

They're two Black women anthropologists-in-training who follow in the legacy of Zora Neale Hurston and other Black women ethnographers. In their three segments What's the Word?, What We're Reading, and What in the World?!, they dig deeper into social issues in a way that is accessible and entertaining.

READERS AND PERFORMERS BIOS

Cassandra Davilmar is a Weeksville resident and founder of Lakou Café, which has quickly become a community cafe, providing fresh coffee, tasty treats, relaxing cocktails, nourishing smoothies, and most importantly, fellowship! You can learn more about Cassandra and her space at <https://www.lakoucafe.com/>.

Adina English is in the 8th grade at Launch Expeditionary Learning Charter School in Weeksville. Being a midwife is her career path, but for now, she has a passion for dancing and community work.

Ebony Noelle Golden unflinchingly pursues justice as an artist, scholar, and culture strategist. Hailing from Houston, TX, and currently living and working in Harlem, NY she is the founder and CEO at Betty's Daughter Arts Collaborative, LLC. She is Weeksville Heritage Center's 2020-2022 Artist-in-Residence. Visit <https://www.bettysdaughterarts.com/> to learn more about Ebony and her work.

Danielle Moulton is a Tour Educator at Weeksville Heritage Center.

Anika Paris is an archivist and library worker based in Brooklyn, NY (unceded Canarsie and Lenape Territory). Her interests include popular education and information sharing, Black folks' cultural expression, and sabotaging the colonization of space.

Nina Pluiose is currently a freshman majoring in psychology at St. Francis College in Brooklyn. You can follow her on Instagram at @lalin_lapli.

Sacha Telfer is an undergraduate student in the General Studies School at Columbia University, where she is majoring in African American Studies with a concentration in Psychology. Her passion lies in education outside of the classroom walls. Sacha is a Crown Heights resident and has attended many events at Weeksville Heritage Center.

Marguerite Thompson is a professor and administrator. She lives in Brooklyn, where she founded and directed the Historic Weeksville Young Ambassadors Exchange Program, creating international traveling opportunities for children across the United States.

Paige Wint is a Crown Heights resident and educator at Seneca Village Montessori School <https://senecavillagemontessori.com>, an African-centered preschool built on the Montessori philosophy that strives to nourish the mind, body, and spirit of its students.

GUEST SPEAKERS AND FACILITATORS BIOS

OlaRonke Akinmowo is an interdisciplinary artist, set decorator, cultural worker, yoga teacher, and single mother from Brooklyn, NYC. Through her artistic practice she explores, shapes, conjures and creates moments that center and celebrate the expansive nature of Blackness and Black womanhood. She is committed to an artmaking praxis that liberates and transforms. In 2015 she created The Free Black Women's Library, a social art project that features over three thousand books written by Black women, as well as workshops, screenings, performances, and radical conversations. She also collects and redistributes funds via the Sister Outsider Relief Grant, a mutual aid initiative that supports Black mothers and caregivers. She holds an MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts and has received artist fellowships from NYFA, Culture Push for Utopian Practice, Brooklyn Arts Council, Robert Blackburn Printmaking Shop, and The Laundromat Project.

Zakiya Collier is the Project Archivist at Weeksville Heritage Center for the Linking Lost Jazz Shrines Project and the Digital Archivist at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Both in her research and in her work as a Black queer memory worker, Zakiya explores the archival labor, methods, and poetics that are often necessary to render perceptible both the material and immaterial artifacts of quotidian Black life. She holds an MA in Media, Culture, and Communication from New York University, an MLIS from Long Island University, and a BA in Anthropology from the University of South Carolina. Zakiya is an affiliate of the Center for Critical Race and Digital Studies (CR+DS) at New York University, an Interim Board Member of the Archival Education and Research Initiative (AERI), and a guest editor of a forthcoming special issue of *The Black Scholar* on Black Archival Practice.

Alyssa A.L. James is a writer and anthropology PhD student at Columbia University, where she studies the discourses and practices that produce heritage through the nascent revival of coffee production in Martinique. She is a 2020 SSHRC Doctoral Fellow and co-host of *Zora's Daughters* podcast. Her work has appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, *The Local*, *Bustle*, and more.

Gabriela López Dena works across architecture, visual art, social practice, and curation to address the relations between the built environment and its social dynamics. She is currently based in Brooklyn, but grew up in Mexico City, where she founded DENA—a transdisciplinary practice to design and build spaces, develop films, and collaborate with other artists. In New York City, she has worked at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics and served as

part-time faculty at Parsons School of Design, where she holds a master's degree.

She began a relationship with Weeksville Heritage Center in 2018 through *Freedom of Speech: A Curriculum for Studies into Darkness*, a yearlong seminar series presented by the Vera List Center for Art and Politics.

Gabriela's current research investigates urban space through an intersectional feminist lens and is currently curating *orientations for a feminist city* at the Aronson Galleries.

Aiesha Turman recently completed her PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies at Union Institute & University, where she also received certificates in Creative Writing and Women's and Gender Studies. Her dissertation, *There's Always Been an Afrofuture: Black Women's Literature as Technology of Protest* explores Afrofuturism's Black feminist literary lineage beginning with the mid 19th century to the present. She was recently chair of the English Dept. at an all-girls high school in Brooklyn where she developed a richly layered curriculum rooted in feminist praxis and social justice. She currently teaches in the Africana Studies Dept. at Nassau Community College.

Brendane Tynes is a Black queer feminist scholar and storyteller from Columbia, South Carolina. She received her Bachelor of Arts with Distinction in Cultural Anthropology with a minor in Education from Duke University. After graduating college, she taught high school science at a public high school in Charlotte, North Carolina, while working as a Student Engagement Organizer at Know Your IX, a nonprofit dedicated to ending sexual violence. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Anthropology at Columbia University, where she studies the affective responses of Black women and girls to multiple forms of violence within the Movement for Black Lives. She is co-host of *Zora's Daughters* Podcast, a Black feminist anthropological take on popular culture and issues that concern Black women. Outside of academe, you can find Brendane dancing, singing, writing poetry, and creating healing spaces for survivors of interpersonal violence. They sit at the center of her commitment to Black feminist anti-oppression work.

CREDITS

This program is curated by Gabriela López Dena; it is part of the Weeksville Weekends celebration of Black Women's History Month. The project has received the support of the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School, where an earlier version of *Strategies of Survival* was presented in 2018.

WEEKSVILLE HERITAGE CENTER STAFF

Anita Romero Warren

Deputy Director

Zenzelé Cooper

Program Manager

Derek Mikell

Marketing and Community Engagement Manager

Zulmilena Then

Preservation Manager

Aliya Bailey

Development Associate

Danielle Moulton

Tour Educator

Sierra Hamilton

Visitor Services Representative

Marcia Lawrence

Development Associate

Chris Clements

Facilities Manager

Obden Mondésir

Oral History Project Manager

Reginald Glenn

Assistant Facility Manager

Anthony Thompson

Facilities Support