



## Pathways to Liberation and Freedom

What has racism cost you?

The vision has always been clear; and that vision is freedom. Nina Simone expressed the famous line, *"I'll tell you what freedom is to me: no fear. I mean really, no fear!"* in her autobiography, *"I Put a Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone"*. Today, we are faced with navigating the complex interplay of emotions and duties. Fear and individual responsibility are two powerful forces that shape human actions and the societal landscape. Understanding their distinctions, especially in the context of upholding equal protections and fostering liberation from oppression, is pivotal in the pathway to liberation and freedom. A world where we are redefining and rebuilding all relationships and activities, based on justice-centered commitments. So that we can remain committed to a vision where all people are free from cages, and all bodies are granted autonomy to live the life that they want based on their own unique wants and desires. Freedom where we remain in right and accountable relationships with people that goes beyond proximity. Where we restore community, where dreaming and imagining are valued and nurtured.

For today, we want to embrace the fact that you're here because you realize we must build critical connections across all cultures, identities, and races to grow in communal ways. Solidarity is the aim. Building culture is how we get there. Movements are born of critical connections rather than critical mass. We sense an activation all around and within us of a bold realization of our deep need for one another—and what is being asked of us.

Many of us know that we need to reinvigorate our muscle for relationship, beyond the patterned ways we engage; in ways that stand a chance of shifting the paradigms that perpetuate harm, patterns that exist in how we relate to ourselves, in our relationships, and that can infiltrate even those spaces focused on social change and correcting deep and historical injustices. It's certainly nothing new to say that we are creating the world that comes next from moment to moment—in each moment; whether we are conscious of our participation—we are each making a contribution. That can feel mystifying, empowering or even terrifying. Ecosystems are only as strong as the relationships we have with each other. This hub is one way to make sense of what is happening through us as we build collectivism and a strong foundation of self and collective liberation.

In the study and practice of emergent strategy, there are some core principles that we have learned and that will guide us. I will remind us of them so that they can grow.

1. *Small is good, small is all (the large is a reflection of the small)*
2. *Change is constant (be like water)*



*3. There is always enough time for the right work. There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it.*

*4. Never a failure, always a lesson*

*5. Trust the process (if you trust the people, they become trustworthy)*

*6. Move at the speed of trust*

*7. Focus on critical connections more than critical mass- build the resilience by building the relationships*

*8. Less prep, more presence*

*9. What you pay attention to grows*

Our best chance at making the kind of change that will shape new worlds through the yearning we experience lies in our ability to recognize our role in world-making (internal, relational, collective), and to step boldly into a sense of shared responsibility for the worlds that come next, and the part we play in the process.

Each of us matters in this. Each of us has something to contribute, and our genius is needed now. It's all hands-on deck to discover what our contribution is or might be. And there are many modes. While the Black Panthers had people on the ground, engaged in direct action, there were also those preparing meals, tending to children, offering hope. This is not a space for passive consumption of information or knowledge, though we will learn from each other, but for collective inquiry, and embodied experimentation & practice. To take our place as an architect; a designer of our shared worlds. The heart of MFG Culture Building Community lies in studying and practicing together, engaging with curated materials, and metabolizing what arises in and between us as we go.

To pull from Grace Lee Bogg's opening to community meetings, let us reflect on the question ***"What time is it on the block of the world?"*** We say the time is ***NOW*** and ***IMMEDIATE*** for ***FREEDOM***. We are living through a time that demands our attention and requires our consistent practice. Even as we bear weary witness to the emergencies and crises swirling around us, we are still connecting. And we are still learning. We are aligning ourselves with shared values and goals and recognizing that entrenched power structures and oppressive systems and institutions can no longer be part of the status quo. More and more we are realizing that justice, liberation, freedom and solidarity are our responsibility. They are what we have a deep yearning for. It cannot be delegated to anyone else!

Black communities experience racism regardless of who the President is. And regardless of who the President is, our Black communities remain under siege. This reality underscores the deeply entrenched nature of racial prejudice and systemic discrimination. The structural and



philosophical ideology that is woven into the fabric. The anti-Blackness that is baked in. While political leadership can influence policies and national discourse, the pervasive and persistent nature of racism means that Black bodies face discriminatory practices in many aspects of life, from law enforcement to employment, education, and healthcare. This enduring challenge calls for a collective and unwavering commitment to dismantle racist structures and promote justice. Racial justice begins with individual sacrifice and resistance and requires a willingness to confront our fears.

Fear is a primal emotion deeply rooted in human experience and often arises in response to perceived threats or dangers. Resmaa Menakem writes in *Quaking of America*, *“Unlike the cerebral cortex, the rest of the human body is not designed to understand logic or context. It doesn’t give a damn whether something makes sense. All it wants is to be safe- and it is designed to create, maintain, or reclaim that safety at all costs”*. Fear manifests in many ways; some say we can be driven by 100 forms of fear- fear of the unknown, fear of change, fear of loss, fear of failure, fear of success, or fear of retribution. While fear can be protective, such as alerting us to potential harm, it can also be debilitating, leading to apathy or even complicity in the face of injustice. Fear serves as an infection to social and racial progress. It prevents us from speaking out against oppression, participating in movements, and supporting policies and businesses that promote justice. Fears of ostracism from family, fear of economic and job loss, and fear of physical harm are perceived as real, and have the power to silence voices and stifle actions that are crucial for the advancement of human rights and upholding constitutional protections and freedoms. Let’s examine the role fear plays in upholding oppression. As we’ve already identified some forms of fear, there is also fear of legal repercussions, social ostracism, or violent retribution. The pervasive nature of these fears in systems creates an environment where individuals *feel* powerless. Oppressive systems prey on this fear to maintain power. By instilling widespread fear among the oppressed and the sympathizers of the oppressed, these systems suppress dissent and perpetuate the status quo. Freedom will never come through an institution or system predicated on the "others" demise.

If fear is an infection, courage and bravery are the antidote, the medicine. But how do we develop and embody bravery and courage? Overcoming fear and practicing bravery requires both individual and collective efforts. On a personal level, it involves acknowledging one's fears and finding the courage to act despite them. A personal inventory. Taking stock.

- Revealing your role as the oppressor.
- Uncovering what gets done first and right within your purview. And journal what gets pushed “under the table.”
- Confronting why you’re afraid of consequences, embarrassment, or risk taking.
- Discovering the patterns of responses to difficult issues, especially ones involving power, race, and advantage.
- Assessing and addressing your gatekeeping behavior.



- Learning what accountability would look like, feel like, and taste like.

This can be facilitated by education, awareness, and the strength of support and people power to build confidence, knowledge, and the necessary trust and discipline of hope to stay true to convictions, stand up for our beliefs, and not back down in the face of adversity. On a societal level, overcoming fear necessitates the creation of brave spaces where people can freely express their thoughts and engage in activism without fear of violence or retaliation. Professor Kimberly Crenshaw said “We have no choice but to fight. We know now that pivoting doesn’t work. They’re coming after the entire infrastructure that has been created by the Civil Rights Movement. What is our response? We have to fight collectively, we have to fight creatively, and we also have to fight with an idea. That we refuse to let we allow anything that we have created to be lost.”

This individual responsibility is not merely a passive acknowledgment of rights but an active engagement and participation in practices that promote the protection and expansion of these rights. At the core of individual responsibility is the moral imperative to uphold the dignity and rights of all individuals. This entails recognizing the inherent worth of every person and acting in ways that embody this. It entails asking the NEXT question. Never stop questioning. Continuing to deepen our political analysis. Individual responsibility involves taking actions that contribute to the dismantling of oppressive structures and the building process of justice-centered systems that respect and protect the rights of all. Active participation can look like many things-- participating in advocacy groups, supporting equitable policies, and educating oneself and others. While fear can hinder actions, a strong sense of duty and self-responsibility can mobilize us in a position to overcome fear and engage in meaningful actions toward freedom. When we understand our unique role in upholding equal protection and promoting liberation, we are more likely to take courageous steps towards justice.

Movements make people act. Ibram Kendi writes in Progress in the 1619 Project by Nikole Hannah Jones, *“The singular racial history of the United States is therefore a dual racial history of two opposing forces: historical steps toward equity and justice and historical steps toward inequity and injustice.”* In strategizing with history, we need to continue to learn from the leaders and participants of The Civil Rights Movement of the 60’s. They serve as a powerful testament of overcoming fear to fight for equal protections that are granted by the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. They faced immense threats, including violence and imprisonment. Despite this, their palpable sense of duty and responsibility to fight for justice propelled them forward. They remained grounded in the hope and bravery of our ancestors. More contemporary movements, such as the global fight for LGBTQ+ rights and the Black Lives Matter movement, also illustrate the dynamic between fear and responsibility. Activists in these movements consistently confront significant challenges and backlash, yet their commitment to justice drives them to persist in their efforts. By standing together and making personal sacrifices, individuals can create a powerful collective force that drives societal transformation and pave the way toward



liberation and freedom. We cannot base our collectivism around the amount of oppression that is administered on any given day. When any are in a cage, we are ALL caged.

How can you show up in a way that builds deeper connections and greater impact in your ecosystem?

**From the core of our soul at MFG, thank you for showing up. We need YOU to grow this community with us.**