

I was at S.A.I.C. I don't know, maybe it was like first year, and our classes were small within the program, it's like maybe six students. And I was on the same shit that I'm on now, you know, like, how can we get free. And I remember one of my colleagues in the class, who identified as Latina, asked me why I was advocating so much for Black people, and not for people of color in general. That the energy and the vigor that I was placing on this particular group could benefit, arguably, like the entire population, right? Which I received as constructive, and an opportunity to reflect before responding like, yeah, that's a good point... and I hear you, but I am not you and I don't understand your fight. You know, like, I stand next to you, I hope that we can stand next to each other, and be accomplices in this work, but I can never speak from your perspective, I can only speak from my own.

And it took me so long to get that language and that clarity. That I can be a support but I have to be, as an organization I have to be so clear about my mission, you know? And my mission is about us getting free, and I have to constantly stay focused on reaching that destination. And in doing that work, it has also become apparent that nobody else is going to do it but us, for us. It has to be us doing it. And all of the other things... you know, I believe in intersectionality, all of these things can exist at once, it's a yes/and. But what I found incredibly important throughout this journey is being in community, like having that tribe of like-mindedness, some kind of cultural understanding, right? A competency, this kind of universality. You know, like there are things that immediately connect us, Kelly, even though we are so different. And it is so awesome being in a space where you feel that connection with someone, and it is just inherent and often doesn't even need to be articulated, you just feel it, you know? And there are moments where I'd be in spaces like that, and I could feel that, and it just became so... it just illuminated that that was unique. And that I didn't have that in every space. And I saw my peers also in those shared spaces having that same realization. And that power that we... that our energies felt, when we could have these shared spaces that felt so safe, and were ours, and we can make them up, that felt like it was moving along in that direction of finally reaching this step

towards that freedom that seems to be something that we are all craving. It looks different, but we all know that it's *this* way.

And so yeah, the power that and the energy that just vibrated in being in some of those spaces felt just really inspiring. And it became so much more urgent to have those spaces, and an acknowledgement that, you know, no one of us are ever doing this work in creating these spaces alone. This space is built based on the people who inhabit the space. It's the people always, not even necessarily the physical space, and so again, like that importance of the tribe. You know? For us to gather.

And this is also not new. You realize that those spaces are often just inherently Blackness, right? Like, I think about my mom's kitchen, which is a gathering space and looks so different. It's a transformative space, but it is a community gathering space, right? And I'm sure that you have had something very similar in your life that feels like a space like that, you know? It's like gathering around art, gathering around food, gathering around conversation, right? Like, these are things that Black people just do, and have done historically. And there's a reason why we continue to center those spaces and to need those spaces. And those spaces are such a threat to whiteness, that that also underscores the urgency of why it is so necessary to continue to reproduce more and more of those spaces, but also protect the ones that do exist.