



“Memories of the Future”
Official transcript of the opening plenary for
THIS IS HOW WE DO IT
The Foundry Theatre’s 2012 Dialogues Series

Featuring Grace Lee Boggs
with Nelson Johnson & Andrea Smith
Moderated by Amy Goodman

Video can be found at <http://thefoundrytheatre.org>
Tumblr for the series at <http://tihwdi.tumblr.com>

The Great Hall, Cooper Union, New York City
Friday, April 20th, 2012

Melanie Joseph: Hey!!

[Applause]

I apologize for not opening for so long. We were having some technical difficulties. We've moved the setup too! *[Laughing]*

Hi everyone. My name is Melanie Joseph. I am the founder and artistic producer of the Foundry Theater.

[Applause]

I think there might be some people here tonight, who were with us 15 years ago in this Great Hall, with these great ghosts, when we hosted another weekend-long festival, "A Conversation on Hope," with Cornel West, our first board member.

I'm really happy to be back here to continue that conversation on hope. First I want to share a couple of things with you. I wrote them down. When I started the Foundry in 1994, I did so in the hope of building a conversation with as many people as possible, about how we make the world together every day. I'm kind of obsessed with the nature of "the invitation." How to invite as many people as possible to these conversations? What are the ways that conversation might be initiated?

The Foundry makes theater some people call experimental or avant garde. Some people ask, "Is this theater?" Then I know I'm successful! *[Laughing]* These pieces reach for a new language of inquiry, and attempt to start new conversations.

We've also hosted small and large town meetings. We had a meeting on the subject of genocide and war crimes.

All I want to do right now is stand up here and sing out the names of people who have made this event possible. They are smart, and generous, and glorious and loving, and legion. I can't name them all.

I must say two names. One is Sherrine Azab, our unsinkable producer. She keeps us vertical. And she kept you all out tonight! *[Laughing]* Thank you to Sherrine.

[Applause]

Yes. And there's one other name. I have the pleasure of calling out the name RJ Maccani.

[Applause]

[Cheering]

That's two C's, one N! Without RJ, this event wouldn't have happened. Where are you, RJ?

RJ.: Hello! Thanks for coming. We called this "This is How we Do It" because we wanted you to literally watch how we set up the stage.

[Laughter]

We wanted to give you a view of our labor process.

[Laughing]

I want to thank my co-worker Sherrine. It takes tons of people to do something like this. They made this whole weekend happen. For those who are able to be with us for Saturday and Sunday too, it will be an amazing exchange. Some practitioners from South Africa, Argentina, and Brazil and other places are here too. Let's give them a hand!

[Applause]

You have pieces of paper in your programs. Hopefully you have pencils too. Unlike tomorrow and Sunday, tonight will be heavily based on listening to stories from some elders, and an elder of the future. That's why we call it Memories of the Future.

To walk that line between being a passive audience and being an active participant in the dialogue, we're trying to take a break halfway through. We will come through the aisles and collect your papers. We hope that you will write a question for one of the presenters on that paper.

As you're listening, if you want to ask a burning question that pops into your head, write it down. If it's directed to a specific person, write their name too. During our break we will collect these. We will share them with Amy Goodman and try to bring your voices in, as we make as much time as possible for them to talk.

Without further ado, I'd like to welcome our moderator and host. You may know her as the spearhead of "Democracy Now." Amy Goodman!

[Applause]

Amy Goodman: Thank you. I'm so looking forward to tonight. To the wisdom of years of experience.

Next week marks the 75th anniversary of the bombing of the Spanish town of Guernica. I think our first speaker tonight, Grace Lee Boggs was twenty at the time.

This was a seminal moment. Pablo Picasso was so enraged, he spent 3 weeks in a painting frenzy. He painted outside of Paris. It's the famous painting, "Guernica," that showed the horrors of war. The angst and agony of war, etched in the faces of the people and the animals.

That painting has become a worldwide symbol against war. Picasso refused to allow the painting to return to Spain under the Fascist general Franco. He had weavers make three tapestry reproductions of it. One is at the UN Security Council. It's hung there for decades. '

When the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, in the lead up, that tapestry hung there. It wasn't lost on the UN officials when, oh, officials like General Colin Powell were making their pro-war announcements in front of this backdrop. And so they shrouded the "Guernica" in a blue curtain. What we will be doing tonight and through the weekend, I think what activism and journalism is about at best, is pulling that curtain back. To show the realities of war.

Whether it's war abroad in places like Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond, or the war at home: poverty, inequality, environmental racism, and other issues. Tonight we will hear three remarkable people tell their stories of what has motivated them in their lives, and what their visions are for the future. That's what makes them all great.

Not only looking back, but continuing to look forward and guide us all. Tonight we begin with Grace Lee Boggs.

[Applause]

[Screening of Video Clip from "American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs"]

End of video.]

[Applause]

[Cheering]

Amy Goodman: I can't believe Grace Lee Boggs has her brakes on!

[Laughter]

Woman: There we go.

[Cheering]

Amy Goodman: Gentle people, Grace Lee Boggs.

[Applause]

Grace, it's very nice to see you here tonight. You were born in 1915, before World War I. You were born in Rhode Island. Then your family moved to New York, to Chinatown. Briefly take us on the trajectory of your life, the journey through those early years.

Grace Lee Boggs: I'm a very old woman. I was born 97 years ago, two years before the Russian Revolution. I am so fortunate to live through all of these changing ideas about revolution. I want to convey what a privilege it has been to see the change of revolution from the vertical seizure of state power through people from the grass roots redefining what it means to be a human being, redefining what it is to become a city, to build a new kind of society, redefining what it means to work rather than just have a job.

They are redefining what it means to make a life and not just a living. We are very, very fortunate to be living at this time. I am particularly fortunate.

I would like to say that we are involved in a cultural revolution as far reaching as that from the hunting-and-gathering to agriculture 11,000 years ago and from the industries 300 years ago. We are re-imagining everything. That is an enormous challenge not only to change the way we organize but also the way we think in order to change the way we organize.

I used to live in New York. I have some concept of what it means to do protest organizing. Only since I started living in a city that is falling apart have I had the privilege of creating a new kind of organizing we call visionary organizing. There is an opportunity for all of us to do that and transform.

I just wrote a column about Malcolm a few weeks before his death. He said, quoting

what Goldwater said in preparation for the 1964 convention, “Extremism in the pursuit of justice is no vice. And moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.”

That is where we are. Let's change the way we think. Let's change the way we organize. Let's make a new world of opportunities here. Let's seize them.

[Applause]

Amy Goodman: Do you remember when you first met Malcolm X or saw him speaking?

Grace Lee Boggs: I was in Detroit. What I noticed most about Malcolm was his modesty and gentleness. The only thing he did was chide us for being too dependent, for not standing enough on our own. The last time I saw Malcolm was after he broke with Mr. Mohammed. We met in a luncheonette in Harlem.

We arrived right on time. He said that is what revolutionists do. They don't run through red lights. We asked him to come to Detroit to organize Black Power with us since he was no longer working with Mr. Mohammed.

Malcolm said he couldn't do that. He would think about it, but he would decline because he wanted to travel and make a Hajj. Out of that Hajj, you need not think in terms of race anymore when it comes to revolutionaries. The question of color shouldn't be part of change. It was a tremendous transition in the debate.

To watch Malcolm undergo this transition was terrific. Think about Malcolm making this transformation and the transformations we can make.

Amy Goodman: When did you start to think of yourself as an activist?

Grace Lee Boggs: I have a PhD.

Amy Goodman: In what?

Grace Lee Boggs: I was working for \$10 a week. In those days, people would say they don't hire Orientals. Many people didn't make more than \$500 a year at that time. But \$10 a week still wasn't that much money. I was lucky that a Jewish woman at the University of Chicago said I could stay in her basement rent free.

The only difficulty was I had to face down the barricade of rats to get to the basement. That made me very rat conscious. It brought me in contact with the black community, which was also very rat conscious.

Audience Member: That's right!

Grace Lee Boggs: That changed my life. I started going to Washington Park on the

South Side. I saw someone preaching. No one was paying any attention. Then A. Philip Randolph, the labor leader, proposed the march on Washington. Thousands of people in every city across the country joined in the march.

Roosevelt begged Randolph to call it off. Even Mrs. Randolph begged him to call it off. Roosevelt was scared to death that 50,000 people would show up in Washington, protesting racism, when he was preparing for a war in Europe.

Finally, when Randolph would not give up the march, Roosevelt issued an executive order banning discrimination in defense jobs. That changed my thinking. If a movement could do something like that, I will become a movement activist. That was 1941.

Amy Goodman: When did you meet Jimmy Boggs?

Grace Lee Boggs: I met Jimmy in what we call the third layer of school in 1952 in the fall. I didn't really meet him then, though. We had a school where we brought people from what we called the black streets who were the activists. They were brought to the school.

I asked Jimmy to dance [inaudible] A few months after that I came to Detroit. I drove a red Plymouth. I would drive him to and from meetings. He would sit in the passenger seat, as close to the door as he could. Finally I invited him to dinner one night. He came to my place and didn't like what I prepared.

In the course of the meeting he asked me to marry him! And I said yes!

[Laughter]

[Applause]

Jimmy was raised in a little town in Alabama. There were more pigs than people. He had this conviction that had kept African Americans hopeful through centuries of slavery. You could make a way out of now way.

Audience Member: That's right.

Grace Lee Boggs: Remember that. We can make a way, a wonderful beautiful way out of what seems like no way.

Amy Goodman: Talk about how Jimmy affected your life as you organized and how you affected his. How did you change as you talk about changing right through today?

Grace Lee Boggs: I think our concepts of history came together. I have a sense of history that goes back to the millennia. It was not just the Stone Age, but the Iron Age, the Axial Age. The age between 700 and 900 BC when all the great religions were born, the Golden Rule, etc.

Jimmy didn't think that way. He thought in terms of the agricultural age, picking cotton, the industrial age working in a plant, and the post-industrial age when hi-tech came in. Our senses of history came together. We organized based on that.

Amy Goodman: How did your organizing in Detroit change? How has Detroit changed?

Grace Lee Boggs: The most important thing to understand as an organizer is that human beings are very, very different. Each one is different. We are not like a school of fish that responds and goes in one direction all at once.

Every time there is a crisis, some people respond as victims. Some people seize it as a time to do something new and exercise the power we have to create the world anew. We all have that power. That is what I mean by growing our souls.

This is a time of growing our souls. Growing our economy has been at the expense of the Earth and other people. It has been at the expense of our own selves, our own souls. We are damaged. We have the opportunity to transform and become better human beings and develop a safer planet for all living things.

Amy Goodman: You created quite a kerfuffle recently. You talked about how we have to move from a protest politics to a visionary politics. What did you mean by that?

Grace Lee Boggs: Let me give an example. We fought for Black Power in Detroit for a long time. We wanted simple things. We wanted more blacks in office at City Hall. And then the young people rebelled in 1967 because they saw themselves as becoming expendable. The plants were not hiring young people.

As a result of that rebellion, we got a black mayor. The white people realized a white mayor could no longer maintain law and order. Then Coleman Young, who is a very smart man, found himself in office. He decided what we need is a casino industry. He said casinos would create 50,000 jobs, and that would reduce crime and violence in the city.

We decided to oppose him. We said there is an alternative to casino gambling. We can enlist young people in rebuilding, redefining and re-spiriting our city from the ground up. And by projecting that opportunity for people to do something to change the world, we didn't get a whole lot of young people but we got enough to get people to think differently about the Earth.

The elders came up and worked with the young people. That started community gardening and an urban agricultural movement. The young people have created a new concept of education as community based to involve the energies of young people and resolve current problems and not just prepare them to fit into the system.

If you make a proposal that gives people an opportunity to exercise their own internal

power, you are amazed what will happen. It may not always succeed, but there are many opportunities, we have lots of crises. We have a lot of opportunities to give people a chance to do something themselves.

Amy Goodman: You talked about A. Philip Randolph, the great community organizer of the 20th century. He organized the march on Washington in 1963.

There is the story of Eleanor Roosevelt taking him to meet with FDR and talking about the condition of black people in the country. FDR is sitting quietly and then said, "I don't disagree with anything you've said. You'll just have to make me do it."

This is a story that President Obama told when he was still a senator running for president. He was in a New Jersey home speaking to about 100 people. At the end of the evening, someone asked what he would do about the Middle East. He told the story about Randolph talking to FDR. He responded to the person: "Make me do it. Make me do it."

Do you think social movements can accomplish that? What is your sense of the Obama administration today?

Grace Lee Boggs: I think the 1930s are very different from this period. We were at the threshold of the American century. The United States dominated the world. Japan and Europe were in tatters.

Today the United States is a dying empire. It will take a lot more than making Obama do things. Thinking of repeating that lesson today is a big mistake. We have to create alternatives.

I think we voted for Obama for a number of reasons. I think it was time for us to have a black man in the White House. I also think we still have the illusion that we could do what Roosevelt said we should do. That we could just have demonstrations. We are in a very different time on the clock of the world. The United States is a dying empire.

Amy Goodman: Do you think America could rise to new greatness, as a result of it being a dying empire? Do you think America could rise to a level of greatness as a dying empire? The father of peace studies said, "The fall of the US empire could mean the blossoming of the US republic."

Grace Lee Boggs: We have to change ourselves. We have to recognize that we have to make a very different kind of revolution. The revolutions that have made in other countries for more things may have been right in the past, but are not any longer. For one thing, we have to live more simply so that others may simply live.

Amy Goodman: Finally -- and this is at the end of this portion of the conversation, before our joint conversation begins -- what are your thoughts on what has taken place in the last year? From the Arab Spring to Madison to the Occupy Movement. What do you

think it represents, and where do you think it might go?

Grace Lee Boggs: Well, I see it as a great opportunity. What the Occupy Movement did in terms of breaking the silence and changing the conversation was very important.

Amy Goodman: Were you surprised by it?

Grace Lee Boggs: Well, I don't think so. I'm not saying I anticipated it.

[Laughter]

I think the work of re-imagining how it should be done, I think that people rely too much on militancy. I think if the Occupy Movement does not begin re-imagining and proposing alternatives, that it will end up defending itself.

Amy Goodman: End up what?

Grace Lee Boggs: It'll end up defending itself. It will need to become more aggressive and more militant in actions and that will enable all sorts of crazy people to do things.

Amy Goodman: Do you think the encampments were a kind of beginning of re-imagining?

Grace Lee Boggs: Well we're trying to do a little bit. There are people beginning to think about it. But not enough. I think all of us need to recall what, in the mid-50s what Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than education." Imagination is more important than education. Begin re-imagining education. Begin re-imagining work. Begin re-imagining demonstrations. Re-imagine everything.

Amy Goodman: Grace Lee Boggs, thank you very much.

[Applause]

[Cheering]

[Screening of CNN video clip "Surviving a Massacre" featuring Nelson Johnson]

End of video.]

[Applause]

[Cheering.]

Grace Lee Boggs: This is Nelson Johnson!

[Applause]

Joyce Johnson, his wife, is over there. They are fantastic people. I met them about ten years ago. We had met at an activist and spirituality retreat. Out of that retreat, we had a discussion about Martin Luther King, about radical revolution, and values.

We decided that we would issue a statement that said these are the times to grow our souls, and visit people across the country. Among those we visited were Joyce and Nelson. Most people have seen that iconic picture of the four black students sitting at the Woolworth's on February 1st, 1960. Well, Greensboro is a city of Universities and cotton mills. And the KKK had a field day at the cotton mills.

In 1979, where Nelson organized a demonstration against them, they came in with guns. They shot and killed five of his associates and wounded Nelson. And he went back to the countryside where he was raised.

And he went to seminary. He decided to create a beloved community, and a truth and reconciliation process to help the city face the race and class challenges of the KKK, and also to help them transform. They had the truth and reconciliation process that Desmond Tutu came to.

It was just incredible, how the revolution requires transforming ourselves and giving others the opportunity to transform. The American Revolution cannot be like other revolutions for more things. It's gotta be for nothing but the people.

Amy Goodman: Before we talk about the Beloved Community Center of Greensboro, there was something in the video we just saw. Especially for young people, and maybe older people. We all live in very different worlds that are not necessarily connected through geography and time. They've never heard this story. Explain what it was you were doing in the 70s that led to this moment, where you pulled the curtain for this march.

Nelson Johnson: Thanks. Just let me say, it's an honor to share this space with Grace.

[Applause]

I grew up in Eastern North Carolina. I'd been a bit of an organizer through high school. And in the 70s, or the late 60s, we had organized something called the Greensboro Association of Poor People. It was a network of neighborhood groups then, it really had more power than we realized. But gradually we came to see that, and at the time we would say that the problem with black people is white people, that something went wrong to me.

As we grew in our understanding and studied Marxism, we felt the need to build unity with our white brothers and sisters. And given our study of Marxism, the place to do that was the point of production, the factory. So we went into the textile mills and we actually did quite well. Jim Waller was the president of the union between Greensboro

and Durham. Sandi Smith was the organizer at the plants in Concord, North Carolina about 30 miles from Greensboro. William Sampson was the organizer and leader of the union building movement at the largest denim producing plant in the world. That was the work we were doing.

Well, the Klan passed out flyers saying that this whole business of unions was nothing more than black people trying to get in charge of and dominate white people's lives. Um. And we had a conference. First, we joined the rally in a nearby city called Chinatown. Then we called a conference to bring together black and white workers, the black community, to discuss how to engage racism in the community and the factory.

We didn't know this, but the Greensboro police had given our parade plan to the Klan and Nazis. Then they went to lunch early. These caravans drove in, and what we saw on the film. It was a massacre. They simply killed the leading organizers and wounded ten people. And the community you saw on the film strip is not the community that was there. It was public housing projects. Little children were playing. People were planning a wedding inside. When bullets rang out and ricocheted off the wall. And five dear friends were killed. And ten were wounded.

Amy Goodman: And you were marching for ...

Nelson Johnson: We were really marching for the unity between black and white. And the struggle in the textile industry.

Amy Goodman: And the people who opened fire were ...

Nelson Johnson: They were a group recently named themselves the United Racist Front.

[Laughter.]

It was a merger of Neo-Nazis and Klansmen from across the state of North Carolina.

Amy Goodman: And the Police were where?

Nelson Johnson: The story they put out was that they went to early lunch. What we found out was that, they knew the Klan and Nazis had come into town. We were not aware of that. They knew where they had breakfast, they'd taken pictures of them taking guns from various cars and concentrating them in one car. The shooters were in the car behind the gun car. And they followed the caravan for about five miles across town. Not they, the one surveillance car. There were no other police officers in the area.

Amy Goodman: You were injured.

Nelson Johnson: I was injured. It was not a life-threatening injury. I was blocking another person, who was later identified as a Nazi, who was trying to stab my mid-section. I threw my arm out and the knife went through my arm.

Amy Goodman: So how did you end up spending the night in jail?

Nelson Johnson: When I looked at the body of my friend, a dear sister who had been president of the student government at one of the two primarily black colleges in the nation -- she lived with us. She had a bullet hole between her eyes. She was trying to get the children back.

I was the person who had secured the parade permit. I sat across the desk from the police captain and had a discussion with him. He said it was our job to ensure the safety of this march. I want you to sign a statement that there will be no arms on your side. I asked why? Is that normally how you do parades? He said, just sign the statement.

When I saw what happened, I knew in the way that people know things, without evidence and without maps and charts, that this could not have happened without the active participation of the Greensboro police. So I stood up and started saying that. The police who had just arrived ordered me to shut up. I said I'm not going to shut up. Because the Mayor and his police officers have planned the killing of my friends.

At that point I was wrestled to the ground. The police chief put his foot on my neck. I was arrested and they would not give me a bond, because if I got out, they said I would be a danger. That's how I spent that night in jail. At the time I did not know all of who was dead, so it was an agonizing night. I was taken to the hospital. Then I left the hospital and went to jail.

Late that night, an FBI agent and a police officer called me down to a little cell where they badgered me about becoming a ... They said my life is not worth a nickel. And that the only life I had would be to cooperate with them. To this day, I don't quite know what that means.

Amy Goodman: Were Klansmen arrested?

Nelson Johnson: Of all nine cars, one was stopped. I think they arrested seven people.

Amy Goodman: What happened to Greensboro after that? What was the response of the community?

Nelson Johnson: The community was traumatized. It was shocked. There were different developments around the city. I wasn't out there after that night. But the next day's headlines in the paper said that the Worker Viewpoint Organization, which was the name of the organization I was a part of, which later changed its name to the Communist Workers Party, were ambushed by the Klan and Nazis. That was the last time the press said anything about ambush. The narrative started to change to that of a "shootout" between the extreme left and the extreme right. And that Greensboro was just a site where people who were not related to that town came to have this fight.

Let me just point something out. November 4th, 1979, the embassy in Tehran was seized by the students. That's at least part of the reason this story was pushed off the headline. The Shah of Iran, the Ayatollah, all of this was the national news. It was convenient for this not to be the main issue.

Amy Goodman: Grace mentioned the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. How did this play out over the years? Now we're talking about more than 30 years later.

Nelson Johnson: Let me say that that city became so polarized. I would not believe that a city in the United States could become as bitter and divided as Greensboro. But I was there. I have been in court. People got up and went to the other side of the room.

The question I raise is: How do you convince a people that what they saw with their own eyes they didn't see and that something else happened? That is largely the level of distortion and fear that was operating there. It resulted in the Klan and Nazis being acquitted in a case brought by the State of North Carolina. And in a federal case on civil rights violations they found that race was not the reason even though they shot two Jewish men, a black woman, a Latino brother, and African American brother. They were able to put forth the argument that race played no role for what the Klan and Nazis did that day.

So let me just say we had a civil suit. It was the only one in which any person of color was on the jury. The acquitting jurors were all white and all blacks had been purged.

On that particular civil rights case, the jury found police officers and Nazis and Klansmen, collectively guilty of wrongful death against one person. That brought that phase of the case to an end.

Amy Goodman: Talk about developing the Beloved Community Center of Greensboro.

Nelson Johnson: You asked a question I didn't really answer about the truth process. I got to the end of my capacity. I thought I was an organizer. I thought I was a good organizer. When I became isolated in my own city, unable to make things happen, it forced me to rethink everything I was doing.

I staggered in and out of churches. I was received, and I went to seminary. While in seminary, the Klan and Nazis made a decision to march again in Greensboro in 1987. It would have been the first time they had been back. When I came home, the State Bureau of Investigation asked what I would do. I felt harassed that they would come to my home. They were setting up the scenario again of the extreme right and the extreme left.

I talked with people in Richmond, where I was at school. I made a decision that I was going to visit the Klan leader and have a discussion. I called him. No, I didn't call him. I wrote a short note and drove to a town about 50 miles past Salisbury on I-95. Near the foot of the mountain I found this trailer. And the Grand Dragon lived there. And I went out there and no one was there.

So I slid the note under the door. I called him at night and told him I'd been to his house. I wanted to talk to him about not coming to Greensboro. He just started cursing. He just went off. He said, "You haven't been to my GD house." I said, "I've been to your house. You go look under the back door and find my note."

He found the note and came back. To make this story short, after exchanges of cuss words and so forth, I said, "I am very serious. I want to talk to you about not coming to Greensboro." And he shocked me and agreed so I made the trip there by myself because he said, "Nobody but you."

We met at a service station. He said look for a pickup truck with a Yankee hat on. I stopped about 50 miles out of town. I got scared and prayed. I went to meet this person. We went to a hotel room. I thought he was going to go out.

We had a discussion. It was a hard discussion. I'll be glad to share that discussion with people later. The end of the discussion was that I asked him why he was doing it. He talked about us raping their women. I told him to be serious. I asked if he saw how many colors black people are and where did he think that came from?

He finally agreed. He said we will come to Greensboro but we won't start nothing. That ended that discussion. I left seminary. I felt somehow we had to find a way, even with the most evil people, not to become so bent in our own internality that we lose the little humanity that we have.

I wrestled with this out of my faith tradition. King was the person I looked to the most. And this notion of the beloved community where the dignity and worth of everyone from all groups, bar none, is affirmed. Where we strive to create a society that builds the institutions and structures that are life affirming themselves.

And so I came back with that notion of how to take the work we had done in that city and begin to fold it into this concept of the beloved community.

Amy Goodman: And the Truth and Reconciliation Commission you established?

Nelson Johnson: That was 1990. When you poison the ground all of this toxin is beneath the surface. People don't know why they can't get along. It loses its identity. It's like it gets in the groundwater and people start to drink from it.

How can you build unity in a city that is actually captured by this part of its past? So we were trying to figure out what to do and how to create a process. It was suggested to me that maybe we need to look at what they did in South Africa as well as Peru.

We got together with some people. There is an entity that oversees the Truth Commission around the world. We started this long process of building a Truth and Community Reconciliation process.

Amy Goodman: The effects of Malcolm being assassinated in 1965 and then King in 1968, what effects did that have on your community, their different approaches and where you are today in your beloved community?

Nelson Johnson: I was in Europe when Malcolm was assassinated. I was a follower of King but I really didn't understand King. I was trying to be a good person. I loved to hear him talk. He could make words sing.

Amy Goodman: Did you see him in Greensboro?

Nelson Johnson: I was scheduled to be there on the day of his death. He was coming to Greensboro to give a speech.

Amy Goodman: From Memphis?

Nelson Johnson: He was coming from Atlanta and then sent a note about going back to Memphis because things had gone awry. He was scheduled to be at a church in Greensboro. I had a nice following of students with me. We were going to cheer him into the airport. It was my chance to really ask him.

At this point, I had come to disagree with him but love him and respect him. I respected him because I was thoroughly convinced he believed this would work. But I couldn't see how it was going to work. This was my opportunity to talk to him. But it didn't happen.

I was caught up in the anger and rage of that period. So I was a part of the people who were saying there is no hope for us building anything. They killed our best person and best prophet. But that gradually gave way to a different understanding.

It was not a quick thing. It took some time. I want to borrow Grace's term to "grow your soul". All of us are born in a culture that specializes in making people other, now it's the Russians, now it's the Jews, now it's the blacks, the gays, the women. We have no sense of who we are except in some kind of "otherized" relationship.

We have a false ID. The ID we struggle for is that we have enormous potential as human beings. We have potential to grow toward the possibility of affirming every single group, every single person, bar none. And we have the possibility of going the other way. The choice is which one do you sow to? Which one do you nurture and want to come into being?

All of this was part of what was driving our thinking around a process that would bring the Nazis, the Klan, the police officers, the traumatized neighborhood, as well as those of us who were present that day, the children. Our children. I had 7- and 8- year-old daughters who saw this. We wanted a process that would bring some truth and healing to our city.

Amy Goodman: Today, the work you are doing in 2012, what are you focusing on?

Nelson Johnson: We name our work building community. The occasion to build community can be anything. It is how you do what you do. We run a homeless hospitality house. We build beloved community out of that. We build community gardens. The homeless people do the gardening.

We engage this unresolved problem of corruption and double standard in our police department. We do energy efficiency on homes. All of that is an occasion to build community.

The most difficult thing about that recently in North Carolina is up on the ballots. On May 8th, they will vote on Amendment One, which is to oppose same-sex marriage. I have been in meetings the last three weeks with African American clergy struggling over this issue.

This is really the most difficult struggle that I have had with my peers. I am happy to say that we made some significant progress. It is just so evil to stigmatize and punish people because of your feelings. We have had to go around in some circles. I say that because that is the last thing I did before I left Greensboro.

I was actually happy to get out of town for a little bit.

[Applause]

Amy Goodman: I want to talk about movement politics and election politics – considering the Democratic Convention will be in North Carolina – but before we do that let me bring up our final speaker tonight, Andrea Smith.

[Applause]

Amy Goodman: Andrea Smith is a groundbreaking Native American activist and scholar. She is the co-founder of the Boarding School Healing Project and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence.

[Applause]

She is the editor of *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*. She teaches at University of California, Riverside and is currently editing a collection of writings on innovative political practices. Welcome, Andrea Smith.

Why did you edit this book, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, and organize the Boarding School Healing Project?

Andrea Smith: *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* came out of work with INCITE!

Women of Color Against Violence, and that work came out of having been involved with the anti-violence movement for 20 years. I was the women of color caucus chair for the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault. I had seen how a movement to end violence had basically been co-opted by the state such that we were essentially an arm of the state and a network of social service providers. But we were not a movement trying to end violence.

Consequently, all our programs were funded directly by the state, many located within police departments. Our solution to ending violence was to work with the apparatus of state violence through the Prison Industrial Complex, law enforcement, etc. In all this desire to become mainstream we never asked ourselves if these strategies were actually working. Of course they were not working because all these laws we passed to make our lives “more safe”, such as mandatory arrest laws, were leading to situations where now batterers were now calling the police first and people who were being battered were the ones getting arrested.

But even larger than that, it became a situation where the state is able to come in and say we’ll put a violence against women provision on a very repressive anti-crime bill and now call it feminist legislation and this does not get questions by the anti-violence movement.

When I was in Chicago, when they were passing anti-immigration legislation I asked what are we going to do to organize against this and they said that was not a gender violence issue.

This is how single-issue oriented this had become but also this showed how much we were in bed with the state. So we traced this and the problem was that 100% of our funding was coming through the state. The state was dictating the solutions that we could come up with.

But ironically what happened was the Ford Foundation, which will figure later in this story, funded us to go to a trip to meet activists in India, which was very informative but we met many of the non-funded movements who said, “Well you think you’re so great just because you’re not taking money from the state but why are you taking foundation funding?” They were giving us a hard time and we thought we were so smug and self-satisfied but they brought us down a notch or two.

When we came back, we really found out how the revolution would not be funded because The Ford Foundation promised us \$100,000. Told us to start committing all these funds. And after we committed all these funds and couldn’t get back out of those obligations, they retracted the grant because of our statements in support of Palestine.

We organized a big conference and big multimedia tour. We had three weeks to find \$60,000. So this is when we had to start the fast and furious house parties, phone banks and we actually raised the money.

[Applause]

The lesson we learned, other than "foundations can be evil," is also the model of that had really deformed the way we thought how we could do organizing and fundraising. We had believed we were actually dependent on that, and hadn't thought of creative ways to fund our own work. It had actually hampered our imaginations about what organizing could become so much so that we thought we needed glossy brochures funded by somebody, rather than maybe you can pick off the top and make copies at Kinko's or something more creative. That's how *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* came about. Many people are struggling with these things, not just the anti-violence movement. We don't have a solution to it, but can we start a conversation about different ways we can do organizing.

Let me mention briefly, what we realized with that process though is that the non-profit is the tip of a larger iceberg. It's not enough to just say, "We won't do non-profits" because that's not necessarily the answer either. We've seen in many movements that it's not just that they don't depend on non-profits, it's that they just don't organize the movement through the non-profit. They have an independently-funded base movement that might use the non-profit in the service of a particular task, but the non-profit answers to the movement, it isn't the movement itself. So it's not non-profit versus no non-profit but what is the proper role of the non-profit?

But also even if you don't operate with a non-profit, if we don't change the capitalist way we live together, we end up in the same situation. Like if we're going to resource our work by all having day jobs and share our resources, but some are much better paid jobs than others, then we just end up replicating a class system in our organizing work. So the critique of the non-profit is actually a larger critique of our individualistic capitalist model of organizing and living together that stops us from developing a really collective way of doing the work that can actually be inclusive of all people whatever the resources are.

[Applause]

[Cheering]

Amy Goodman: What is the Boarding School Healing Project?

Andrea Smith: The Boarding School Healing Project is actually a group that's now become the Boarding School Healing Coalition, trying to build a movement for Native peoples and their descendants who have been subjected to the U.S. boarding school policy. So just to make a long story short if you're not familiar with this, basically in the 1800s, the U.S. government decided the best way to solve the Indian problem wasn't to just kill them -because that was too expensive- but it would be more inexpensive if we took native children from their homes at age 5, put them in boarding schools until 18, routinely sexually, physically and emotionally abuse them, and return them to their communities unable to speak the same language as the people in their communities.

The result of this is this is where we see the beginning of sexual abuse, alcohol abuse, and all these other things in native communities that didn't exist before because prior to colonization most native communities were not patriarchal. They were not built on these structures of social hierarchy. It's slightly overgeneralized but clearly what happened is the boarding schools completely changed the way these communities worked with each other but also you have generations of people at these schools who were never parented, never loved, and passed that to future generations. About 100,000 people went through that system. Most people are affected by it even if they weren't directly affected by it.

Amy Goodman: Did you go?

Andrea Smith: No. But I should say they are still going on now. They aren't mandatory, but in some areas there are ongoing allegations of abuse that are not being addressed. The larger issue is that this is a history that there's been no acknowledgement of it. In Canada there's been a huge movement around this. There's actually been a settlement, which has been problematic in many ways, but at least it's an acknowledgement this happened. Whereas in the US there's no acknowledgement of this history that has had such a devastating impact on native communities, no mention that this has even happened.

The group started with a woman who used to live in New York, Sammy Tanita, from the Rosebud reservation and she saw what was happening in Canada and said we need have a similar understanding for what was happening in the U.S. She brought people together to start this movement. It's been a very slow process, because we would start to do a documentation project on these abuses, and what happened is, we might have a meeting at a certain place in South Dakota and people don't have a lot of resources. It would take effort to drive 200 miles to get to this meeting. People would get to the meeting and they couldn't walk into the door because of that level of trauma. The big think I learned from that experience is that we often have an idea of an organizing model based on being these cool badass superstars, rather than building movements around the sick, tired, busy, depressed and dysfunctional people that we actually are!

[Cheering]

What I learned from this is, maybe more extreme, but I think it's emblematic of movements in general: we can't have a romanticized notion of who we are and build movements around them. We have to integrate healing into the movements, not say, "Go heal on your free time with somebody with an MSW and then when you're healed join the movement." It has to be part of it.

[Applause]

Amy Goodman: How have you made through your work, the movement a healing process?

Andrea Smith: Ironically I learned a lot of this from the Promise Keepers. That was a huge evangelical men's movement. I was going to these events as part of my research. I noticed that they were a lot of fun! They had cracker jacks and hot dogs and singing and dancing. Everyone was nice to you. Poor Stan had a problem with pornography or something, and they didn't yell at him and say you're gonna burn in hell. They said Stan we want you to be the Christian we know you can be, we're here to support you!

Then I reflect on movements on the left when I would go to those meetings, those meetings that lasted for like 4 hours, there's no food, and everybody's yelling and being counter-revolutionary!

[Audience laughing]

And we wondered why nobody wanted to join!!

[Cheering]

What I learned from that is, when we think about the revolution, and we have this workaholic approach where we are going to work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and the revolution is supposed to be right around the corner, you can keep that up for like 2 weeks before you wanna run out to the day spa, right? If you want a movement that's gonna be more long-term movement, it has to be something you get from as much as you give to. It has to be something that's nourishing. It has to be something you want to be part of. That's when I realized we have to build a movement that's so much fun, people can't wait to join!

[Audience applauding]

That's basically how we changed our process with INCITE. We started saying, we have to go to the movies, and that's as important as a business meeting. We actually have to make these things fun. One of the things we organized was a Sisterfire tour. Instead of the usual boring conferences, let's start having multimedia arts and culture projects to spark your imagination in a different way and make you want to be part of the movement. It changed the way we thought of doing the work, rather than boring talking heads, let's get the pamphlet out and educate everybody. Let's find new ways of doing the education that people actually wanted to be a part of! That's how my organizing's changed.

[Audience applauding]

I've been involved in a variety of indigenous movements. The ones I've been most influenced by are the ones in the U.S. and Canada, but also Latin America, which are re-thinking what indigeneity means. In particular was very influenced by the 2008 World Social Forum. The indigenous people of Latin America issued a collective statement that said the number one question they wanted to put on the table was the question of the nation-state. They said the nation-state hasn't worked in the last 500 years, so I don't

think it's gonna start working now. But, what they put on the table is is there a different way we can think of how we would live together, under different forms of governance structures that we can manage? Of course if we de-colonize our imagination, we know these things do exist because they existed prior to colonization.

Grace spoke about how we would think differently. They put it on the table: we have to re-think who we think we are. If we go with the western model of the self, that sees oneself as over and against other people, then the nation you build will be over and against other nations. Consequently we find ourselves in the current structure if people encroach on your land, the only thing you can say is, "It's not your land, it's our land." But you can't say, "Well why is the land anybody's land? Why is it a commodity that can be bought and sold?"

The thing we're putting on the table is to re-think our relationship to land and each other, so the self sees itself through its radical relationality to all peoples, all creation and the land. When we see ourselves in this radical relationship with all things, the nations we build will also be in this relationship with all of nature.

So I think it just sparks our imagination of how we could live with each other in a radically different way that is not about my struggle or your struggle, but rather how, our struggles only work when they work together. And consequently that real democracy, not this fake, faux democracy of the U.S, but a real democracy in which we all participate in creating the world that we want to bring into being.

Amy Goodman: Which is a great way to lead into folks writing down questions or comments you have. As Andy talks about having some fun and bringing culture into this, let's pause for a moment now, to celebrate.

[Audience cheering]

Lear deBessonnet: Hi! Is this one on? Can everybody hear me if I'm talking at this volume? And the mic is on now. Good. I didn't realize I was the celebration part of tonight. *[Laughing]* I'm glad.

This is a moment to stretch your legs. Also, in the tradition of passing the peace, to turn around and introduce yourselves to the people around you, to learn who else is here.

[10 minute break. Comments and questions collected from audience.]

[Audience talking and sitting down.]

Amy Goodman: This conversation that we are having is called Memories of the Future. Grace Lee Boggs and Nelson Johnson and Andy Smith will also just talk to each other and ask each other questions, share comments, and there are many, many questions that you have. One of them is, "How would you make the Occupy movement fun?"

[Laughter.]

Grace Lee Boggs: There are a lot of minds in this room. You're the ones who have to do that.

[Applause]

Amy Goodman: This is a question for Reverend Nelson Johnson. What advice would you give to an organization who wants to form their own truth commission?

Nelson Johnson: Talk to Jill Williams. She is sitting right there. She was the director of the Greensboro Truth Commission. But let me say this. Working to secure a depthful truth is not easy. Because we have been living in a culture of layers of falsehood for a long time.

So I think you need to be committed to stay with it. Persistence is one thing. Structuring it in such a way that you bring the various components of a community into the process and get a good buy-in. And I think the spiritual dimension of finding a way to be in conversation that may be very different, you may be on a very different points of view but is, in some way, affirming of the humanity of the other.

We would be glad to share more extensively videos and tapes and our whole process of how you structure it. Each one has to be done to fit the particularity of the situation that you're dealing with.

Amy Goodman: This question is from an audience member. I would be curious to hear why Andrea Smith's organization focuses on women of color. What are their particular concerns beyond women more generally?

Andrea Smith: In forming INCITE!, we decided to rethink what women of color politics is. Before we operated around this inclusion model. We would be part of this larger antiviolence movement and spend all our time yelling at them for being racist and if we yelled very eloquently, they would pay us to yell at them. But this didn't really lead to any results.

Then we thought if we didn't do it around inclusion, what if we took the history and lives of women of color seriously, what does that tell us about the world? When we do that we see that we cannot look at gender violence without looking at state violence simultaneously. If we look at the histories we have been through, the state has been the primary perpetrator of violence in our communities.

[Applause]

But then when we do that, we realize that that actually changes the politics not just for women of color but for everybody. Because the approach for all people of all genders trying to end violence with state violence is just not an excellent idea, right? So having a women of color analysis is not an insular analysis, it is actually an expansive analysis that

can be liberatory for all people. So that's the sense in which I see a women of color politics.

[Applause]

Amy Goodman: This is for everyone. What books are you reading? Or writing?

Grace Lee Boggs: I'm reading a wonderful book called Healing Civilization by Claudio Naranjo. He is a psychiatrist. He says there are three brains. I think neuroscience is very important. He says there is the matriarchal brain, the patriarchal brain, and the child brain. We have to reunite them and overcome the domination of all our institutions by the patriarchal brain.

I think that is a huge challenge, to know ourselves and to know our institutions and to know what the culture is and to know that we have the power in our minds, within our brains actually, to exercise a more matriarchal culture. We can create one.

Andrea Smith: Other than People magazine, I would highly recommend Dean Spade's new book out. Normal Life is just an excellent book that looks at the limits of legal reform and what it can actually accomplish. It looks at our reliance on things like gay marriage and hate crimes as a solution to address heteronormativity, when in fact it re-instantiates it. It's just a great book that looks at the intersection of white supremacy, colonialism, heteropatriarchy and actually has practical strategies for how you organize in light of this larger analysis. Run out and buy it right away if you have not already done so.

Audience Member: What is it?

Andrea Smith: Dean Spade's Normal Life on South End Press.

Nelson Johnson: I am reading a book by Thomas Berry called The Great Work. It functions off the assumption that there is a radical separation of the human from the rest of the earth. In that sense, the humans see everything else as an object to be explored for our interests. But we have to develop communion and intimacy with all of the other aspects of creation, both living and non-living.

I found that powerfully energizing. Because, in point of fact, biblical Christianity has played an awful role in facilitating the radical separation of humans in a way that is just destructive because we do not respect everything else and if we see ourselves as dominators, then we end up dominating each other as well as abusing the resources of the earth.

I think Berry does a good job in helping us see that.

[Applause]

Audience Member: What is the book?

Nelson Johnson: The Great Work by Thomas Berry.

Amy Goodman: I recommend two wonderful books. One is Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. Michelle Alexander is at Ohio State now in Columbus, Ohio. She wrote this book in four years, having given birth to three kids at that time. She was a clerk to a Supreme Court justice, Harry Blackmun. She was dealing with a racial justice project of the ACLU. She just started to come around to see the criminal justice system in this country and the number of people who are incarcerated.

She put it together in a way we have rarely seen. From the slaves of the 19th century who could not participate in the electoral process of choosing their leaders, to their descendants in the same situation today. They are not enslaved, but because of voter ID laws or laws regarding people in prison not being allowed to vote, they have similarly lost their right to vote and participate in the election process.

Also, my colleague Juan Gonzalez's book is recommended. It is *News for All the People: The Epic Story of Race in the American Media*. It is a tome of a book. You see the beginning of media in this country, newspapers, and who they were written for. Always about who owns the presses? In the early days it was about giving out information to white settlers in the United States about where Native Americans were.

It is an incredibly comprehensive look at the lens through which we have seen ourselves from the founding of the United States to today.

I wanted to ask Nelson Johnson this question, everyone, about this question of electoral politics and movement politics, especially in the age of President Obama. The movements that got Obama elected in 2008. What has happened? What about the goals of all these movements?

Whether it was the closing of Guantanamo and the end of torture, which clearly hasn't happened, to the ending of war, which has not happened, to dealing with the economic downturn, President Obama surrounds himself with the very people who are causing the problem, the bankers or some say the "banksters."

Nelson Johnson: I want to make two points, maybe more. First, I want to join with Grace in saying that how we look at politics and electoral politics in this period is different from how we looked at it in a different period such as the 1960s, for example.

In the 1960s, the great struggle was to join something and be let in. Give us a slice of the pie. Count us in. That was a necessary struggle. But now I think the issue is that the aggregate systems and institutions of the nation and indeed the world are exhausted and dysfunctional.

So the whole question of getting in is a different kind of question. I want to say that first. Therefore, I think that electoral politics ought to be done as part of building a grassroots base.

Building a grassroots base that in itself offers an alternative versus the view that if we elect Mr. Good Person, that they will make these things happen. They really can't make them happen. There's plenty of room to criticize President Obama in terms of surrounding himself with people that further isolated him from the spirit and the grist and gut of those in the bottom.

Obama comes off as a good-hearted man. But right now we need a vision that grows out of the base of the community that persists and persists and persists. We are going to be in Charlotte, that's where the convention is this year.

But part of what we're going to do there. First of all when I say what I'm speaking about, and I'm not sure if this is what I'm speaking about, but there is a discussion in the Council of Elders about a role that we can play in preventing something that the right wing would want and that's Charlotte from becoming a big street fight. Something that won't help push forward any positive agenda. Doing what we can to register people.

But I think that the key in doing electoral work now is building a base that will persist beyond whatever elections we are dealing with and continue to raise criticism and do the best you can to hold elected officials accountable.

[Applause]

Grace Lee Boggs: We have to recognize that representative democracy, like the nation-state, was born 200 years ago. Now we are in the age of globalization. We cannot think of the same division of power. We cannot say pledge allegiance to the U.S. constitution, when that constitution was created in 1787, long before globalization.

Native Americans in particular are raising the question about land as to how we can conceptualize a new nation. We have to think about re-imagining democracy, re-imagining the constitution, re-imagining government. And I hope people come to Detroit in the summer of 2012, from July 1st through the 15th, where we are re-imagining the revolution and everything.

[Applause]

Nelson Johnson: Grace, let me ask you this. In our state and in another state, draconian laws are being proposed. The Racial Justice Act is being repealed.

Amy Goodman: What did that do?

Nelson Johnson: It really required the courts to look at the question of race as it related to citizen and particularly capital punishment. Where the numbers showed a tremendous

imbalance towards black people and people of color as these laws are applied.

The voter ID and the same-sex amendment, all of these things have consequences in terms of creating a culture of division and a culture of hate and a culture of repression. What is your suggestion on how we look at that as we are seeking to build an alternative to that?

Grace Lee Boggs: I think we have not yet decided what values we are going to live by. That is why Martin's speech of 1967 was so important because it called for a radical revolution in values against racism, militarism and materialism. I think that we have to understand that is where we are in the clock of the world.

Our talents are much greater than creating a base for Obama.

Andrea Smith: Sometimes I think this division, like either you are for revolution or you have short-term strategies that you need for basic needs. And we don't see how they could work together. I think the reason is that when we do things like electoral work, we don't give up our investment in the United States continuing to exist, right? So consequently get disappointed when the President of a settler state founded on genocide and slavery doesn't work out like we hoped, right?

[Cheering]

But of course, the problem is the structure of the nation-state itself. In particular the US settler state. Nobody can lead it and do anything good, right? It's based on the logics of domination, hierarchy, and control. But if you're trying to build the kind of world you want to live in that doesn't mean you don't need short-term strategies that create a buffer for yourself so that you have more space to create alternatives. So you can do those short-term things as long as you realize that's only what it is, a short term thing.

So just to give one example, when the Obama thing was going on in Michigan. Well INCITE! we found it very helpful, we joined in and got the map of the whole city and used that map to do our own organizing! People were so used to having their doors knocked on that they actually opened the door when we knocked on them! The outcome was we took the opportunity to use that situation for our own purposes. It's not short-term vs. long term. It's short term informed by the long term, so you're doing short term things that get you closer to where you want to go, not farther away.

Amy Goodman: With the horror of the Trayvon Martin killing, and then the special prosecutor being appointed, and handing down the second degree murder indictment against George Zimmerman. The special prosecutor said something interesting. She said, "I want people to understand this didn't come as a result of outcry. We weighed the facts of the case, clearly that led us in this direction and that was to hand down this indictment." But what wasn't said was that clearly it would not have been within her purview to do this, if there wasn't this mass uprising that led to the appointment of a special prosecutor, very much led by Trayvon's parents. The hundreds of thousands, or

perhaps millions of people all over the country weighing in in all different ways, you see that making the justice system work ever so slowly. We'll see what happens. But what about that power of movements? Were you seeing that in North Carolina?

Nelson Johnson: To go back to the Trayvon thing, I think it's absurd to assume an indictment would've come down without massive protests. But I think, in the process of doing that, people have to work, as our sister said, on the long term goals we seek. Because there are Trayvons in every city. There are Trayvons in jail all over the place. And they're going to continue to be until there is a dismantling of that apparatus, and the replacing of that with something fundamentally different, that's rooted in justice and love and so forth.

[Applause]

So I think the point that was so clearly made here is that protests at one point was for the purpose of getting in, and assuming that that actually was the goal. Right now the protest has to facilitate and help the building of an alternative toward the thing that's being protested, and providing for people a buffer if you will, a space if you will, and relieving some of the oppression that grows out of a dysfunctional order of domination.

Grace Lee Boggs: What do you think of the statement that many folks are making, that it's the same as always, that black men are being targeted. Do you think it's the same as always or do you think we're in another time and place?

Nelson Johnson: I think it's different. Black men are being targeted. I thought that was the point that Michelle makes so powerfully in the book. It's being done in a different way about race. It doesn't look the same. The second thing is the solutions are not the same. I think the emphasis here has to be on -- let me put it this way. People talk about ending the war. How can the war be ended, in the structure that we're in? It's built on war! People need war! And the whole economic order.

I'm saying, I don't want to say that there's no difference. That would be spitting on the struggles of people years ago. It is different. But we have to recognize, that the difference is in degree. We have to recognize that the challenge now is to transform the whole system and in that process transform ourselves.

Grace Lee Boggs: Would you say it's necessary to recognize that it's counter-revolution, that it's not the same as Emmett Till being killed in 1955?

Nelson Johnson: Talk to me a little bit.

Grace Lee Boggs: Unless we begin understanding that the people who are supporting and sponsoring the stand-our-ground thing are the Americans for Prosperity, are a lot of corporations, and that the counter-revolution is building. And thus we may begin to build a more total revolutionary stand, and go beyond the question of race, that we are really losing ground.

Amy Goodman: It's interesting that you raise the question of the stand-your-ground laws, the shoot first laws that have been challenged. We've seen something remarkable happen. Not only this grassroots movement of love around it that has led to the indictment, but the family has led it. Saying, "He is our son, he is all of our sons." Trayvon. But that has led to this de-stabilizing of a right wing organization called ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council. How many of you have you heard of this group? ALEC is an incubator for legislation in states around the country. Stand-your-ground laws being passed in state after state. Conservative legislators are invited to these meetings, they're often secret.

Corporate executives from many corporations, many of them multinational corporations, are there. Laws are written. Then handed out as a blueprint to be passed in state after state. But because of the stand-your-ground laws, and the backlash against it, and the Voter ID laws, and the backlash against it, and the work of groups like Color of Change, which is calling for boycotts of companies that poured millions into ALEC, these corporations one-by-one are pulling out. Because they are being called by name. Pepsi Cola pulled out. Coca-Cola pulled out. The Gates Foundation pulled out, which was putting money into privatization of education. That whole agenda. Wendy's pulled out. The latest was Young's, which owns Pizza Hut and Taco Bell.

And now ALEC has announced they're dropping their social agenda of pushing for stand-your-ground and the Voter ID laws. I mean, these laws if you actually look at them are almost identical in each state, the actual legislation down to the typos! It has really exposed. The Center for Media Democracy in Wisconsin has been targeting it. Go to the website Alec Exposed. Color for Change is a very important organization that has been organizing boycotts and at least a dozen major corporations in this country have said they won't support it now.

Grace Lee Boggs: I welcome the boycott of all these, and the weakening of ALEC. But I think the analysis is still too old. The fact that this country has lost two wars, our economy is in shambles, our culture is in shambles, all that means we have to make a very total revolution. We're much closer than they were in the 1930s. To understand the depth and breadth of counter-revolution and therefore the depth and breadth of the revolution we have to make is a challenge.

Amy Goodman: Travis Smiley and Cornel West just wrote this book, *The Rich and the Rest of Us*, said that...

Woman in audience: Andrea's trying to speak!

Amy Goodman: Yeah. I'm directing this to Andy. 1 in 2 Americans are now poor, new poor, or near poor. Not one in 3. Not one in 5. 150 million Americans, which goes to your issue. How do you address these kinds of problems?

Andrea Smith: I was going to speak on the previous thing --

[Cheering]

Maybe I'll address it. But I was thinking, when you asked if this is a different moment, or maybe an opportunity here, it speaks to what Nelson has said. Could this be a moment for creating an alternative? In this case the obvious alternative is the alternative to the prison industrial complex, right? That we can't think of another way to hold Zimmerman accountable other than through the current system. We can't think of another way then to demand that the system do justice. And we don't have to figure out how to do justice ourselves.

Of course, when we think of prison abolition, it's a positive project, it's not a negative project. It's not let's tear all the prison walls down tomorrow. It's if you're under attack you never call the police. It's, why do we have no other options besides the police? And can we start to create the alternatives that start to squeeze out the current system such that we end up having true justice and accountability?

I think maybe the opportunity when you talk about the counter-revolution is is there a different mode of accountability? Of working with the counter-revolution that is not expecting the state to solve the problem. I'm thinking of your story of how you directly talked to the Klan member, your story gives us a model of what that might mean. It's not mediated through the state, it's something we'll have to take on directly.

[Cheering]

Grace Lee Boggs: I'll also say, I have my reservations about Michelle Alexander's book.

[Applause]

I think calling it the New Jim Crow suggests that racism is the main contradiction. I think we face so many other contradictions that we have to re-invent, re-imagine solutions for it. And that's where we are, Jim Crow is something we fought and re-naming this is suggesting that it's a race issue. It's much more than that, our educational institutions are pipelines to prison. The economy, the lack of jobs, and other things have destabilized the country.

Nelson Johnson: You know, there is a sense of which as the whole corporate state entity declines and it's compelled to take more and more drastic actions, the whole energy of making people "other" intensifies.

The historical basis for making people "other," one of the strongest ones in the United States, is race. So you would expect that to intensify. As it is intensifying. It doesn't negate the fact that the whole social order is collapsing and every aspect of it has to be re-imagined and rebuilt.

I don't want to see these things pitted in a way that, perhaps, they don't have to be pitted.

I think Michelle Alexander documents very thoroughly the case that she makes. And the young men we brought to Detroit. They are in jail now, without bond. When you see that happening, you can't say it's not happening! Or that it's just an incidental thing. It's all over. That's the point that she made.

What do we call that? What do we name that? And all I'm saying is, acknowledging the reality of how race plays a role in the country is important. Otherwise people who identify that way don't feel that they're being in this discussion. That's the point I'm making and that in no way minimizes the point that I think you are making. And that is that just fighting a race battle does not in and of itself create the alternative that we all know we need, and we have to build that alternative into our fight.

[Applause]

Andrea Smith: Also, what do we think the race battle is? In other words, given the specificity of anti-black racism, that cannot be understood outside the logics of capitalism, and the creation of blackness to be equated with property. Also normalizing the property relationships between all people within a capitalist system. To me a struggle against anti-black racism is necessarily an anti-capitalist struggle.

If we look at the struggle against settler colonialism, that's not just about Being Nice to Indians Day, right? It's about the normalization of the nation-state form of governments that's actually there to destroy an alternative way of living, not just for Native peoples, but for everybody. If we look at the War on Terror, which as you noted. The U.S. should not be seen as being at war. But the US as war. It's about the normalization of war as a state of being. So the anti-racist struggle is a struggle against settler colonialists logics, capitalism and war. That's what a racial justice struggle is. It's not just against discrimination, though I would agree that in addition to Michelle Alexander, we cannot forget Ruthie Gilmore's excellent book, *Golden Gulag*, in which she offers some of this larger political economy of the Prison Industrial Complex.

Grace Lee Boggs: I would like to know, why are all these applause taking place? Is it because you believe we have to make a revolution against the counter-revolution? Is this discussion going to continue?

Nelson Johnson: Just clarify that a little bit, Grace.

Grace Lee Boggs: I think one of the difficulties is that we have not recognized that each of the struggles that we carry on – whether as Native Americans, as blacks, as whoever -- at this particular time on the clock of the world, when we have to make such total changes. Needs to lead to revolution. To an American revolution. How you name it matters, what you call it matters a great deal.

Amy Goodman: Someone in the audience asked Grace, "What is community based education?"

Grace Lee Boggs: Community-based education is recognizing that the wall put up between the school and the community, and that we need to prepare the children to eventually succeed in the system is bankrupt. It's responsible for much of the imprisonment rate we have now.

It's to engage the energy and creativity of young people into solving problems in their lives. They see them on their way to school. It's to change the relationship between the school and the community, to involve the parents, teachers, and students in creating the community.

[Cheering and applauding.]

Andrea Smith: In LA they're trying to build an alternative to the Academic Industrial Complex, and I think it's interesting that we have a prison abolitionist vision and not an academic abolitionist vision, right?! If you're stuck in a University you were to say, "What would be a liberatory model of education be? Would this be it?" You think, "God, I love studying for finals and flunking. That's so much fun." And yet we don't think about an alternative to it. All we think about is whether we're going to get tenure. Or how do we make sure ethnic studies doesn't get cut. But we don't ask ourselves why we think the university owns ethnic studies in the first place, right? That they can cut it.

It seems that now there are these movements developing with people in high school radical teachers saying, "We want to go beyond just calling for higher wages. We would like to actually create the educational model we'd like to see in combination with people in the ethnic studies department saying we're no longer just about making sure our department doesn't get cut, but actually re-locating the department outside the academic industrial complex." Education is ripe for a new political imaginary about what education should look like, but not as a commodity you buy and sell on the academic market place.

Amy Goodman: "Andrea Smith, you are a gift to the future, on your comment regarding my struggle versus your struggle, do you think the Occupy 99% realize our struggle is their struggle? Talking about connecting the 99% with the rest of the developing world.

Andrea Smith: That's a critical thing. One of the issues is as the system is crumbling in the U.S. we don't necessarily have a global analysis. Even if we get a pay cut, we still have lots of stuff we only have because we extracted it from people in other parts of the world, right? If we were to actually have true economic justice, we'd have even less than what we have now. That's a problem with the demands that we're wanting more, rather than thinking about actual global redistribution, and what would that look like.

But also, I think it's more important why we need to think about building a different world. I think one of the reasons why we have this counter-revolution, is that people see change and only think of what they're going to lose. Like people would say, "Well if we end global oppression can I still watch the Sopranos, or can I still have my iPod?" Because we can't imagine what we would be getting if we had a different world. We

can't imagine what would it be like to be in a community where we're supported, where we're not worrying about structural violence, where we know somebody is going to have our back when we need it, where we are respected, where we know we have power over our lives in a real way, where we know our needs are always going to be met. We don't even know what that feels like. So when we think about massive change, people only see what they'll be giving up, and they don't see what they'll be getting. If we don't start creating alternatives now, rather than waiting for the revolution first, people will never have a sense of that and they won't have the desire to actually bring that. I think Occupy is great for what it's sparking and I think we can build on this to think about how we want to run things ourselves now.

Amy Goodman: We'll end with two very large questions that are connected.

How do you create a visionary society when weighed down by so many who are dreamless and stuck by the worst of our yesterdays? And I think that couples with, and each of you hold forth on this, what gives you the most hope for the future?

[Laughter]

Grace Lee Boggs: I place my hope in the fact that human beings are not only victims, that they have the power within them, as I say, to create the world anew. And that the time is ripe to create that new world, to propose alternatives and not just protest against what is.

[Applause]

Nelson Johnson: I want to join in the notion that we as humans have enormous potential and possibilities. Scarred, wounded, hurting, and in need of healing. I think the context of healing is community. We have to build what we call the Love Community on whatever level you exist, five of you, three of you, a neighborhood.

It's in that context that the transformation of our internality can best occur, where we are loved and nurtured and supported and challenged to be different. Grace introduced me to a book called *The Blessed Unrest* by Paul Hawken. He postulates that hundreds of thousands of small groups are forming right now.

I think the question of connecting those and creating alternatives that are more locally based is where I think the movement needs to go. I think this whole national thing of one or two superstars is yesterday's news.

[Applause]

That is where the local piece comes in. We have to envision how to build local food security, local transportation, local clothes. I think that visionary organizing calls us into that. The street that we do our work on was just a bad street. Sometimes people would be drunk and laying by the side of the road.

I challenge everyone around that you have an option. One is that you take a snapshot of that person and freeze it there. Then you name the person a drunk. I choose not to do that. Here is somebody who is drunk and laying by the side of the road. But I know who you are. You are not that.

You have a potential inside of you that actually is enormous. I may not know how to get after it, but I'm not going to certify this false idea that culture traps us in. I will always lean the other way. I think that is what the better community has to do.

[Applause]

Andrea Smith: I find it easier to get less depressed when we don't internalize the capitalist model of success created by the non-profit industrial complex. Instead of, "If your campaign is not successful in nine months you have failed", right? Instead just recognize that revolution is 99% an exercise of frustration. Things you do will fail miserably. That's okay. Failures are not failures. Those are things we learn from that make new things possible later.

If we do that, we have a revolution of trial and error, with an emphasis on error. Then we are just in a different space for the long term. I remember I was listening to a right-wing activist on TV. He was asked, "Why do you seem so much more successful than progressives?" He said, "Well progressives organize for the next election, we organize for the next 100 years." That's what we have to do. We have to organize for the next 100 years, but that's OK because we are going to have fun doing it!

[Applause]

Amy Goodman: This is just the beginning of a very interesting weekend called "This Is How We Do It: A Festival of Dialogues About Another World Under Construction." Go to it. We want to thank Andrea Smith so much for being here.

[Applause]

We want to thank Reverend Nelson Johnson.

[Applause]

And Grace Lee Boggs.

[Applause]

And early happy 97th birthday!

[Applause]

[End of event.]