



## The Activist Files Episode 51: Vision Dreaming for Black Trans Liberation - On Imagination, Mutual Aid, and the Road Ahead

Announcer:

Welcome to the Activist Files, the Center for Constitutional Rights podcast, where we feature the stories of activists, lawyers, and storytellers on the front lines fighting for justice and liberation. If you want to know more about the Center for Constitutional Rights and our work, visit our website at [ccrjustice.org](http://ccrjustice.org). You can sign up for our weekly newsletter, Front Lines of Justice, and we'll keep you up to date on important developments and exciting events near you or online. You can also make a donation to help us keep doing the vital work of supporting our partners, movements and communities. As always, don't forget to subscribe to the activist files and rate us on iTunes, Spotify, and SoundCloud. And now here is the Activist Files Podcast.

Lexi Webster:

Welcome to the Activist Files, the Center for Constitutional Rights podcast. I'm Lexi Webster, Communications Associate at the Center for Constitutional Rights, and I'm joined today by Imara Jones, award-winning journalist, content creator and thought leader and founder of TransLash Media producing content to shift culture towards trans justice and Diamond Stylz and activist and media maker and executive director of Black Trans Women Inc. Building leadership and advocacy among black trans women. Both are also podcast creators, Imara hosts the TransLash podcast, and Diamond hosts the Marsha's Plate podcast.

Lexi Webster:

Thank you so much Imara for joining us and really excited for today's conversation. And also want to celebrate all of the ways that you have been celebrated and given your flowers this year. I'm really, really <laugh> just so honored to be having this conversation with you today. So getting right into, into our conversation, I really wanna start unpacking with you these recent attacks on trans rights and reproductive justice, the ways that they intertwine and the ways that they intersect, and start thinking about the resilience and mutual care of our communities, both

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historically and recently in response to these attacks. In your work specifically, what are you seeing? What are the conversations that you're having on the ground and how are these types of legislative, legislative attacks playing out? How are they intersecting? How are they impacting you and people that you love?

Imara Jones:

Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate it. So these two issues are inherently intertwined. They are intertwined historically because the expansion of trans rights and visibility happens at about the exact same time as Roe v. Wade and the central conversation about who gets to control other people's bodies. And those two things have gone in parallel for the past 50 years. And there are so many ways in which for the right, those two conversations, those two movements represent twin threats to their desire and belief of the, and the need to create a Christian nationalist country. And that's why they are so focused on both. And we know that the organizations that are behind these trans bills across the country, are the exact same organizations that have been at the forefront of turning back the clock on abortion rights since the 1980s, they are at the Heritage Foundation Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, and the Alliance Defending Freedom, among others, National Right to Life. But National Right to Life doesn't work on both issues.

Imara Jones:

So we know that the, it's the same opponents, it's the same billionaires with the same vision that are funding it. And we know that this movement is learning from each other. We know that the, the anti-trans movement is borrowing from many of the strategies that were learned in the anti-abortion movement, such as beginning just this year, the targeting of trans doctors, the targeting of trans care for youth, which is a new development. And we also know that for the anti-abortion movement, every single person that I know that has studied that movement had been embedded in that movement. Many of them posing as members of the far right in order to learn more. Told me last year that when Amy Coney Barrett got on the same Supreme Court, they were confident that they were gonna win on Roe V. Wade. They've known for a year and a half, and that one of the things that they know that they have to do is to give this entire anti-abortion machine that we've spoken about something to do afterwards.

Imara Jones:

You know, all that energy, all that money, all those volunteers have to go somewhere. And that they're pretty clear that they're going to take that entire movement and begin to turn it against trans people. So anything that we've experienced with anti-trans legislation, with the protest at trans events or where there are trans people, we're just at the beginning of that. You know, we're just at the beginning of that. There's so much more of that to come. And so these two ideas, these two movements are inherently linked and they are inherently linked for the far right. And I think that that's one of the most important things for us to understand and to realize.

Lexi Webster:

Well, thank you. We're also joined today by Diamond styles and activists and media maker and executive director of Black Trans Women Inc. Building leadership and advocacy among black

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trans women. Thank you so much for, for joining us here. Loving your space! This feels like an alter that I'm able to, to be there with you.

Lexi Webster:

Literally is to all black trans, and black people, Monica Roberts, [unintelligible], That's literally what it's supposed to be. <laugh>.

Lexi Webster:

Yeah. And thank you for describing that out loud to our listeners as well so they can get a sense of what is it we're seeing. I'm looking at these beautiful these beautiful lamps on either side that are illuminating you are of, of black women in, in head wraps and beautiful Afro diasporic-

Lexi Webster:

Exactly.

Lexi Webster:

Jewelry pieces. So, so lovely. Thank you so much for joining us. So, and

Lexi Webster:

This is my mom

Lexi Webster:

And your mother's joining us today looking over us and blessing this space.

Lexi Webster:

You are lovable and deserve love. Yeah. So many things. That's what I'm glad you got that.

Lexi Webster:

Thank you so much for, for joining us here. Coming in as we were having a discussion around the recent attacks on trans rights and reproductive reproductive justice the ways that these two things intersect and how historically, and also in, in today's moment, in the contemporary moment, how, how these are showing up and impacting people that we love. I I was really just impacted very strongly Imara by the words that you had to say about the white supremacist and the also Christo fascist elements of these movements. The ways that we as a, as a white hegemonic and Christian hegemonic country have been, have been seeing not only a burgeoning movement, but a historic movement, a long, long standing movement with lots of organizing on the, on the right and on the far right, especially of anti-trans, anti-black, anti-queer, anti-immigrant organizing to create and, and found a, and create a country that looks like it did at its foundations and looks in in the ways that they would like to see this country going. So I'm interested Diamond to hear your reflections on some of the things that you heard from Imira, but also I do wanna know from, from you and the work that you do, how are you impacted by these

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conversations? How are the attacks on trans folks, the anti-trans bills around the country and the recent reversal of Roe v Wade, how that's impacting your work?

Diamond Stylz:

Absolutely. So what I love about what Imara said is that she talked about our enemies in the sense of, you know, people on the right, but even capitalism for how it affects people on the left who are supposed to be our allies. When we think about prior to 2015 when gay marriage was, you know, passed for the cisgender people who wanted to have gay marriage before that, they were asking our politicians to see how progressive they were when it comes to our community. They would ask them, What is your stance on gay marriage? Right? And that was the litmus test of, you know, how progressive you are. If you think about once that passed 2016 election with Hillary and Trump, they were asking, what is your stance on the bathroom bill? What is your stance on the trans issues? What is, because now we are the litmus test on whether or not you are progressive, whether you or not, you are where you need to be when it comes to the LGBT movement.

Diamond Stylz:

And so we started to see about, we started to see more issues with us and with our allies. We started to see more performative things like when we think about how people fundraise, what grants were getting approved, it was things that had you had to have some type of trans-inclusive issue in your grant in order to be able to get the money. Are you working on black trans women? What kind of programs are you having that are impacted? But what I saw as a person who worked in Nonprofit Industrial Complex, that's what I love to call it, I saw people asking for the money, but they didn't have black trans people in leadership. The money really wasn't going to black trans peoples and letting them lead and, and be impactful in the actual communities there. It wasn't, it was nothing but cis white LGBT gays that were in positions of power.

Diamond Stylz:

We started to complain about that because Black Lives Matter movement moved in, moved people's mentality in a different direction and we started to complain why y'all don't have any trans in leadership. There's people who are qualified, why are you're not putting them in that position? And we started to see more and more now trans people in positions, but it still has that toxic, I'm just trying to get money so I can be able to do whatever we need to do for our issues instead of being specifically proactive for trans people's issues in community. And so it is a very, very capitalistic, performative nature of even people on our side that's, that's growing just as long with the people on the, the right to benefit themselves instead of just actually helping community. And that's what I see it from the nonprofit area of this, this fight that's going on that's been going on since forever, but new, I guess metamorphosis of it. <Laugh>

Lexi Webster:

Yeah, I'm, I was transported when I heard you mention capitalism when I heard you mention the organizations that are vying for grant money that are vying for funds to, that do work, to to outreach work, to impact work in trans communities, but who have no trans people on their board, have no trans people in leadership in managerial and supervisory roles. And I was taken back to 2020 when 15,000 people stood in front of the Brooklyn Museum and Raquel Willis said,

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If you don't have black trans people, if you don't have black trans women, if you don't, if your organization is lacking programming for trans people, you are obsolete.

Diamond Stylz:

Yeah.

Lexi Webster:

And that sent shivers through my body, and again today, I, I felt the goosebumps when you said there are so many ways that this movement is being commodified, monetized for whose benefit? And, and, and this is how capitalism let some and how capital corrupts.

Lexi Webster:

I'm love to start to like maybe pivot a little bit more toward, I think Imara, you've already discussed a lot about where this came from, but I would also like to think about what is it that we're doing on, on our side. We know who the villains are. We have a sense of like, who is the opponent? Who is that we have to, to combat what is happening on our side? Who are our supporters? Who are our co-conspirators? Who are our collaborators? How are we working toward pushing back against the sense that trans people don't deserve to exist, don't deserve to use the bathroom, can't participate in sports, all of these things. And either of you, if you wanna take that,

Diamond Stylz:

I see for me how important it is for us not to be stuck in our silos when we think about voter suppression organizers, when we think about reproductive justice organizers, when we think about trans organizers, we all can be stuck in our silos. I know that we may not agree and align with every single thing, but at the end of the day, our enemy is the same. We are fighting the same people, the same people who feel like that they can control our lives with their religion. And so it is important for us to be in communication with, with each other. I made it in my organization, I made it a really, really strong point to be able to, to hit up people who are like, Hey, I know that you are voter suppression activists. What can we do to help you? Hey, I know that you are reproductive justice.

Lexi Webster:

I don't wanna be centered that I'm not a birthing person. And so I don't wanna be centered in that space, but I know that if they come, when they come out of the after the agency of your body, they're gonna come after agency of mine. And it's like clearly as Imara just explained, they're gonna come after us simultaneously. And so how can we figure this out together, really be proactive in getting out of our silos and actually working on the issues that we, that we have together. And <laugh> June Jordan talked about it, how we may not, when we get to this goal line, we may go in different directions once we accomplish, what we accomplish. But at least right now, can we work together to get to solve the problem that we're trying to solve since we have the same enemy?

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Imara Jones:

Yeah. I think yes to all of that quite clearly. And I think additionally, a couple things just to expound a little bit on White Diamond said don't you love Sing Diamond's name? It always had like evokes richness and beauty. So in any event, as Diamond said, you know, I think that what's really important to realize is that some of the largest organizations in LGBTQ Inc., Gay Inc. As it used to be known.

Diamond Stylz:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

Imara Jones:

That have the depth of the resources, the big budgets to be able to help counter some of this are missing in action. And at the same time she is correct that they are at the same time simultaneously [inaudible] trans stuff.

Diamond Stylz:

<Laugh>.

Imara Jones:

So that is, that's a problem that's gotta be fixed. And I'm not gonna say anything more about that cuz it's just apparent, but that's not gonna work. That the biggest guns are silent at the most important part of the battle. But at the same time are raising money off of the fact that there's this battle, right? And don't have enough people in trans leadership, and certainly aren't engaged in black trans communities and aren't doing enough for black trans people in the south or rural trans people. Or we could really go on to those most in need. It could go on and on and on. And it's deeply frustrating for me as I witness it and it's literally, you know, the alphabet soup of gay organizations to start doing, just start doing the various alphabets and you, you can figure it out. It's also important for us to begin to get our act together on this particular issue as a community.

Imara Jones:

I personally know that some of the largest trans organizations have just started this year having a regular phone call. And that is important, but that has to accelerate times 20, right? We need to be doing that. We need to be coming up with a strategy. We need to be networking with local trans organizations and the most affected states. We need to be asking them what they need. And there just has to be, you know, a greater sense of, of urgency. And it's really hard because it's not as if we have a shortage of emergency issues in our community, Right? Whether or not it be housing, economic justice, access to education, healthcare, intense job discrimination, like the list is massive. And so it's, this is adding to the list of things that we have to cope with. But I think that this threat is, is different because we have all of the things that I just listed and now these people are talking about using the government to literally legislate us out of existence, which is a whole other level of oppression that would compound everything that I just said by a massive number.

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Diamond Stylz:

Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>.

Imara Jones:

So I think it's really getting our minds around this threat. I, I remember I was speaking to a trans leader la- no, no. This year and this person is tremendous and said to me, you know, I just really started focusing, I just really started taking these anti-trans bills seriously. Like this month <laugh>, this was in, this was in, this was in June of 2021. And I said, What do you mean? And they were like, I just thought it was just the general noise that the right always makes about trans people. And I'm like, this is totally different. Like this is not that, like this is them. I mean, Marjorie Taylor Green has already said that if the Republicans capture the house, the first thing she's gonna do is introduce anti-trans bill. Like it's gonna be a whole nother level. And we know that like when they do things like that, it then ups the violence against our community.

Imara Jones:

People believe that they then have license to brutalize us more to that political violence translates into actual real violence in our lives. Right? And so I think that one of the things that we have to just think about is understanding that this is a real threat for our community and beginning to try to figure out how we're going to respond and not just thinking that this is just the normal noise from the right. Because this is an entirely different level of threat that we're facing. I mean Diamond is in Texas and has a sense of this as well, but the way in which like the anti-trans movement is now partnering and teaming up with the armed wing of the, of the white nationalist movement. So the way in which Proud Boys are showing up at trans events and other LGBTQ events, the way that people sponsoring legislation in Arizona, a senator there is actually also a member of Oathkeepers. So the way in which they're like beginning to fuse their anti-trans push with these groups that tried to overthrow the government.

Diamond Stylz:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

Imara Jones:

So I think that like it's understanding that this is a very real thing that we're facing as a community. And it's really hard because we face so many things, but I think that this is gonna be a whole nother level that we have to begin to at least mentally prepare ourselves for.

Lexi Webster:

And I think there's so many things that are coming to mind as you're speaking. I mean the, the first was I did wanna reflect again on, on Diamond your, your discussion around how we cannot exist in silos. I also want us to remind ourselves that like these aren't issues that happen in silos. These are intersections that happen within people in our communities, like.

Diamond Stylz:

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Mm-hmm. <Affirmative>.

Lexi Webster:

If we're talking about reproductive justice, there are people whose reproductive rights are being taken away within the trans community. They're trans-masculine people who are now threatened both for how they present and how they navigate their healthcare, but then also being subject to threat by the same things Imara That you've described. Proud Boys showing up at at pride events, showing up at reproductive centers like these armed militia that are being mobilized and organized around the country.

Diamond Stylz:

Mm-hmm. <Affirmative>.

Lexi Webster:

In, in ways that, that you know, orthogonal also to what what I was mentioning earlier about how the the Right is, is out-organizing us a little bit. Like they have really got this, they have template bills, they have weekly calls, they have monthly like membership meet, like they are organizing to make a reality.

Diamond Stylz:

Mm-hmm. <Affirmative>.

Lexi Webster:

The necro-political and biopower, you know, just to, to borrow and Mbembe and, and Foucault for a minute. Like organizing around controlling who has access to life in this country and who doesn't.

Diamond Stylz:

Mm.

Imara Jones:

Yeah. And they, that's intentional because for the far Right which is now the mainstream, Right. Since Trump came, right, There is no far Right there is just the Right now.

Diamond Stylz:

Mm-hmm. <Affirmative>.

Lexi Webster:



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And the Republican party. So a key part of their belief is that America is not only meant to be a white country, it's meant to be a white Christian country. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And they see the decline of white Christians and white people who identify as Christians and white people both as frightening and anti-American. They see, literally see it as anti-American.

Lexi Webster:

Yes.

Imara Jones:

And their belief is the way to turn that around is that you have to have more white Christians having babies mm-hmm. <Affirmative>. And at the core of that is the control of people's bodies.

Lexi Webster:

Yes.

Imara Jones:

And so that means that you can't have these trans people because from their perspective, trans people disrupt the flow of reproduction.

Imara Jones:

You certainly can't have these gay people and these black people. We have to find a way to suppress them so that they don't have an influence on policy cuz they're Christian, but they ain't really with our vision. And then we of course have to stop around people from crossing the border. And if we put those things together, we can recreate what we believe America to be, which is a white Christian nation. So this is a singular vision that they have and this is why the attacks on, on us and on our bodies across the board are so intense because for them, this is at the core of their mission to put white Christians back in the driver's seat in America. This is not like the way that liberals and the Left see trans issues, which is like, oh yeah, trans things are cool, but we have so many other things to worry about. And so trans people, y'all just go in that corner and be quiet and we'll... Take a number, literally take a number and white people, white Christians are looking at us and being like, no, those people that you're putting in the corner, that's actually one of the main targets and main issues for us to create our vision. And so we're gonna go after them. And it's this total mismatch in vision. Yeah. And it's real. I think that's the biggest thing is that it's, it's, it's absolutely 1000% real.

Diamond Stylz:

And this is a multifaceted problem. So it's, it's gonna be a multifaceted solution that we need. The why they are out-organizing us, is because yeah, the Proud Boys and you know, those quote unquote "far Right", like Imara said is all the Right just yes. They, they may be doing some egregious stuff. They may be, you know, trying to <laugh> June, January 6th, the, the capital. They might be, they might be doing these things, but they're on our side and we <affirmative> and we can denounce 'em all day. But we know they're gonna show up when we need them to show up. We need to have that same comradery on our side where when anytime we have these issues, it,

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it feels like our identity politics get in our, in our way to stop us from working with each other. At least until we get our goal, which is what I said earlier, it, we know the wait and see idea, particularly for black men.

Diamond Stylz:

We know the wait and see doesn't work. We have to have a, we have to have a plan that includes all of us getting across the finish line. And so, because there was, there's been so many times that we had somebody say even LGBT people, the gays and lesbians say, let's do our issue first. And you know, we'll come back and get trans people. But as we can see that same fight, that same number of people that show up is not exactly the same. Yes, we have wonderful LGBT allies, there's so many of them, but we do not have as many as we did when we were trying to fight for gay marriage. And so we have to, we have to literally step up to the plate in the same exact way and know that this is a multi-faceted issue and we need multi-faceted solutions and prongs of how we're gonna fix it just like they do.

Lexi Webster:

Mm-hmm. <Affirmative>,

Diamond Stylz:

They know they gotta go after reproduction. They know they gotta voter suppress black people. They know they gotta go have to trans people and the doctors that are allowing us to exist, they know that. And so this is their multi-prong strategy. We also need a multi-prong strategy as well.

Imara Jones:

Oh, that's right. As I say all the time, I I say that like the Left talks inter intersectionally, but the Right fights intersectionally,

Diamond Stylz:

Come on now.

Imara Jones:

You know that that's like, that's, that's the difference, right? They, they understand these connections and they battle that way. And then liberals talk about intersectionality, but don't move that way. And I think that, just to give a really concrete example on the Trans!Action! Podcast, actually, we interviewed a trans person who had worked for a plan, Planned Parenthood and Trans Mensing, a non-binary. And they said they told Planned Parenthood that they were working with on this project. They were like, you guys need to start focusing on, on trans issues. Planned Parenthood is one of the largest providers of trans healthcare in the country. We have trans people who are coming to give birth to be able to, to come into your clinics. And you need to understand this intersection. And they said that they were told by the Planned Parenthood leadership wherever they were, that, that they would eventually get to trans people. And so they should stop talking about it and not worrying about it, because eventually that was gonna happen.

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Lexi Webster:

<Laugh>. Oh my goodness. So,

Imara Jones:

And then, and, and then one year later, you know, everything is gone. So I think that we have to understand the inherent links between these issues.

Lexi Webster:

My last question for you, Imara, I think because we are, are dealing with all of these ways of understanding what injustice looks like, understanding what these oppressive systems look like, how they work, how they've developed, and I, I, I wonder as somebody who my, I myself have to set a lot of side ti time aside to really imagine, Yes, I need to have time for myself to imagine, I have to take a step back from a lot of things in my life to, to cultivate imagination. And I wanna hear from you, what are you imagining and what, yeah, what do you, what is your like, I don't know, your freedom dream or what does justice look like to you? However you describe that. What is your imagination? Where is your imagination taking you?

Imara Jones:

Ooh, what I say, what I've said for a really long time, what I continue to say and what I think is like a unitary vision that most black trans people have actually, you know, I really imagine a world where we are thriving, right? We are thriving in every single way imaginable. And I know that for that world to exist, that we have to fundamentally restructure the way that our society works or that we can thrive. Because in a, a world that's dominated by racism, by patriarchy, that's not possible. So how do we fundamentally shift our systems to center the wellbeing of people? How do we shift our systems to think of human development and self actualization and realization as the purpose of society over the narrow accumulation of well through oppressive means? And I think that's what the vision is. And that's actually what the challenge is.

Imara Jones:

Like, we have to reimagine society for us to thrive because we're not gonna, fundamentally, we may make it and do better, right? If things change marginally in the system that we have, but we're not gonna thrive. It's very different, right? That means we're not having trans suicides, trans people are able to stay in school, trans people are able to live out their lives without the idea of physical violence and oppression, right? The list goes on. We are able to live healthy lives just as long as everyone else. So that means we have to change society. And that's what we represent is that invitation to everyone else to do that and to join us in that re-imagining that restructuring, that revisioning. And there's so many trans people across the country who are creating pockets of that reimaging whether or not it be with regards to economic justice or housing or, or criminal justice or environmental justice. Literally there are these pockets of visioning. Diamond just came from one, from the transgender district, but there are these pockets of reimaging all across the country that black trans people are involved in. And I think that the goal is to expand those so that we can build a society where we center the wellbeing of people. And in that society, black trans people are thriving. And that's my dream.

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Lexi Webster:

Mm, yes, yes, yes, yes. I'm recently just going a lot. I'm re revisiting a lot of the teachings from Tony Morrison. One of the teachings that she left me with that has continues to impact myself, impact me on a daily basis is when I say people, I mean black people. And in very much a Tony Morrison way, when I say, when I say people, I mean black trans people. And I, and I heard that in what you were saying, that like when we say people, we can't just mean some, you know, abstract idea of who a what a personhood is outside of transness and outside of blackness. But like, we need to be very specific that like, when black trans people are thriving, you know, everybody else is gonna be good. <Laugh>.

Imara Jones:

That's exactly right. That's exactly right. Like, that's exactly right. We are the indicator of the health of your society.

Lexi Webster:

Very good. How do you see us getting there? Like is there a pathway that you're kind of like carving out for yourself that you see as a route to this, this dream that you have or a route to this, this future that you see?

Imara Jones:

Well, I think it involves all of us actualizing this vision that I had in our immediate worlds. You know, taking what we know how to do, right? And then saying, in the space that I have, you know, I am going to create a pocket of reimagination, right? I am going to create a different vision for how to do this, for how we are able to structure this and what it means to do this in a fundamentally different way. And I think that, and so I, I try to do that in my work in media and in communications and journalism. Like that's a huge part of the way in which I think about my work. But I think that we all should do that wherever we are. We create these pockets of re-imagination and, you know, that's how every, that's how everything big starts is through everyone doing the small things at simultaneously that create the conditions for the bigger things to happen.

Imara Jones:

So I really believe that that's the predicate, you know, I think that it's what Tourmaline calls vision dreaming, right? And she sees her work, for example, as vision dreaming, like literally creating a vision of the future through art and with a black trans lens. So whether or not you work in food or you know, whatever you're working on, where you're working on politics, whatever you're working on, you know, I would say that you wanna create a pocket of re-imagination where in that world, in that space, it's a fundamentally different way of doing things where our stories are centered, where we're thriving and we're thinking of how to do things and, in a way that's totally different from the world around us.

Diamond Stylz:

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Amen.

Lexi Webster:

Oh, [inaudible], thank you so much. And Diamond turning it back over to you on the subject of imagination, on the subject of thinking about where it is that we wanna go the world that we wanna see. And I think that especially if you could think about your community, your immediate community, communities in the South, how do you see, what do you see, like what you see is like your clairvoyant eye, <laugh> forward thinking brain. Like how do you see us going?

Diamond Stylz:

Just reinforcing what Imara just said, it's like, imagine what can you do with your power? Now we know we don't have the power of, you know, so many people who can just kind of swipe a finger and, and fix some issues. But with the power that we actually do have, what can we actually do in the power that we, in our homes, in where we work, How are you being inclusive where you actually do have power? When we think about, maybe like three years ago, I worked for Bath and Body Works and I worked for them for like eight years as a store manager. And when I came there, <laugh> as the manager, it was nothing but college-age Caucasian people working there, <laugh>. And so, but when I left, it was Caucasian, Asian, black, it was six LGBT people on a, on a team of 24.

Diamond Stylz:

It was so diverse. And in that, in that little store, we were top two in the city. <Laugh> We went from being seven to top two in the city because of that diversity, because of all the talent and skill that everybody on that team had in their ability to relate to people, the different languages that we all spoke, the different type of people, it made us grow. And I feel like in our country, we will see that same type of effect if we actually imagine and do something different. When we think about the, the amazing work of, we brought up the transgender district, when we think about Aria and her, you know, her vision of during Covid giving out these mini grants and, and how that rippled across the rest of the country. People were giving out direct grants without all the barriers to help sex workers keep their phone on when their clients couldn't come because of Covid.

Diamond Stylz:

We were at, at our organization, we were literally mailing boxes of food to people who were of course laid off and or, and people were using this as the opportunity to fire trans people. Like we were trying to get rid of you. Anyway, so boom, <laugh>. And so we were mailing food and, and going out with our masks to people who were unsheltered and, and get getting them hands sanitizers and really thinking about how, what have we been doing that's working and what have we not been doing that we haven't tried yet? And really imagining a new plan, reimagining new leadership, reimagining everything that we have been doing that hasn't been working, throw that away and do something new. And while art and like art and entertainment is always the first place to attack, that's why we see book bans and people not be able to show different shows and

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different things happening in movies, people, you know, gay relationships and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Diamond Stylz:

Or art is the first place that they attack. And so why I love these, these beautiful images, this of trans people happening on television, on shows also, let's do that in our everyday lives. If you are, if you are a leader at a church and you want to be inclusive of trans people, how are you getting your church to go out into the community of trans people and say, Hey baby, you can come here and you will be welcome. Like, how are you going out into community? Because of course they're gonna be scared to come to your church because of the history of religion and you know, the Christian Right, and you know, Muslim, Right? And blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. How can we act? How can you, if you want to be inclusive, go actually in community and find people who might resonate with your message and be inclusive, really think outside of what you've already been doing to do better and to get to the people and make them inclusive, and really do something for community if you are trying to do that.

Lexi Webster:

Oh, goodness, I'm, I'm receiving so much. And also like ruminating on so many things that, especially as you mentioned the church, there is this, this one writer named Julian Jarbo, who, who wrote a tweet that went viral a long time, a bit of time ago, like three years ago, four years ago, and said, God blessed me by making me transsexual for the same reason he made wheat, but not bread and fruit, but not wine because he wants humanity to share in the act of creation. I'm only doing the good works here on earth as intended in, this is a piece that I think that can resonate with so many people, but specifically trans people who have been imagining and who have been participating in the act of self-creation in so many ways. And I think Imara, you've already mentioned this to an extent, but one of the reasons that the Right, and one of the reasons that legislators who are trying to police the existence of trans bodies is, are so afraid of that the notion of trans people existing is because we primarily existing by virtue of being authentic in our bodies and in ourselves, and affirming that who we are is not only okay, but correct and right, we disrupt the, the status quo.

Lexi Webster:

That there's a prescribed path to anything transness is terrifying to people who would like to be dogmatic, who would like to spread prescriptivism. And so I'm, I'm really excited that we can have a conversation about this and also Diamond excited about the ideas that you brought to the forefront around mutual aid, which we didn't even get super into, but that would love to hear how mutual aid has been central to your community. You had an episode, a whole episode of TransLash about mutual aid, and so I think that that could be somewhere that I would love to explore with you too, if we have time.

Imara Jones:

Yeah. I'll just say something quickly because I have to go. But I think that the, the entire idea of mutual aid is a great model for our entire community, which is that like we do have the power to help ourselves, You know, that's actually the fundamental belief is that we have the power to help

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ourselves and we have, and, and we know what we need and we can mobilize for that. And I think that if we kept that spirit on everything, if we can translate that spirit across the board, that fundamental knowledge that we know how to do, and the reason why it was so quick to spring up is because it's a muscle memory. Because people have done mutual aid for our friends <laugh>, you know, like it's a thing that you know how to do, and then it was taken and then applied it to an entire community in crisis, right? So it's that same idea of like taking and having fundamentally fundamental belief that we know what we need, we know how to deliver what we need, and we have the resources and to do that. And I think that that is the very essence of power, and that's one of the reasons why I'm, so, I think mutual aid is such a powerful thing for us to continue to talk about because it underscores like the fundamental power that, that trans people have even in extreme marginalization. And we have to hold onto that. Yeah.

Lexi Webster:

Wow. Imara, thank you so much for joining us today. I know that you have to depart, but your words were received. I'm, I'm so, so grateful to have had you here today. Yes,

Diamond Stylz:

Thank you sister.

Imara Jones:

Thank you. Thank you so much, Diamond. I wanna see more hats on you, <laugh>, Lexi, you are smart and you are beautiful and you have so much to offer our community. So I just wanna give you encouragement to keep going and to keep growing and to keep using your voice. We need you.

Lexi Webster:

Thank you, Emma. I have chills. I I it's been such an honor. Really has.

Imara Jones:

You're welcome. Bye y'all.

Lexi Webster:

Bye. Getting right back into into our conversation. The girls can't get together without kiki-ing just a little bit, <laugh>.

Lexi Webster:

Talking about mutual aid. Can you tell me a little bit about how mutual aid has been central to the work that is being done in your community and how mutual aid might be different, how might look different where you organize, where you live, where the folks that you are, that you are building power with?

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Diamond Stylz:

So understand that Texas looks totally different than we would see like a New York or New York state or California when it comes to trans benefits and what helps them and how they have access to medical and how they have access to anything <laugh> when it comes to housing, anything. Like, it's totally different. We are in the dark ages, so when it comes to those kind of issues, So when we are organizing, we really, there is a emphasis on transferring resources from Big Org to the direct hands of the people to, to get what they need. <Laugh> it is a big emphasis on doing that. It's not this big old bureaucracy and machine that's you gotta do da da da da, no is we are trying to get money from Big Orgs to the hands of trans people. And so how we see that impacting is that we can actually directly help people.

Diamond Stylz:

There was, for example, there was a person who was homeless calling our organization living out of their car, their car. We, because we, we have a whole network of people that we can call and see what's going on. We were literally able, because we don't have a lot of homeless shelters that cater to trans people in our state, in our cities, in our state, period. So we literally was able to spend direct services money on getting this person at Airbnb for a month. And then when, because of the, because of Covid the job, there was no jobs hiring <laugh>. And so we were able to actually get them a ticket to New Orleans to be in the House of Tulip, which is a homeless shelter ran by Mariah Moore. And we were able to get them down there and really, really start their life.

Diamond Stylz:

Now they are working, they are thriving and doing what they need to do. And that is what Mutual Aid actually does. It actually gives them a leg up in this world that can be so harsh for us. There can be so many barriers. How can we eliminate those barriers and get them in a position where they can use their skills and their talents to thrive? And so we, that was just one example. We, we helped so many people in particularly during that covid, and we had, we had to pivot. And so that is, it is just a direct connection when we talk about programming, sometime programming can be really, really there. There's a lot of red tape. There's a lot of people, like when we think about programs, a lot of programs are urban and and centered in the city when we can, when there are rural people who don't even have access to access to it.

Diamond Stylz:

And so there's many times that we don't think about, like I said, that multiprong that multifaceted solutions that we don't, just don't think about that because we don't have trans leadership <laugh>. There's a lot of times that we don't think about the, the many faceted ways we can help. And it only takes a little bit of pivot. You don't have to redo the whole thing. You, it just takes a little bit of pivot. And if you listen, we would be able to do that. And that, that is what mutual aid and that direct connection to the people has and does for you in solving a problem that you see out in the streets, that you see in people's homes. Period.



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Lexi Webster:

Wow. I'm just over here snapping and, and nodding and like <laugh> just like moving my body in, in, in agreement and in yeah. In like deep, in deep consideration of like how these things are showing up in my life as well. And then one thing that really stuck with me about what you're saying of on the subjects of, of mutual aid is that like there is a restructuring that needs to be done so that we can be, instead of like sending all of our dollars out to these like, you know, nebulous places, not knowing who it's taken care of, but like finding the source of like finding the site where need is mm-hmm. <Affirmative> and making sure that the, the need is filled. The fact that you are able to get this person support for an Airbnb, get to the House of Tulip, getting them connected with Mariah Moore, like that's incredible.

Lexi Webster:

Yes. And in impactful work that doesn't only, doesn't only lift up the person who is receiving and, and being, you know, being transformed by this care, but also every person that they later come into contact with, like mutual aid work doesn't just, I think about the quote like, when you heal, you heal like seven generations back in, seven generations forward when you do mutual aid, when you work with people and make sure that their, their material needs are met, they then take that, that framework, that understanding of what community looks like and they apply it to every aspect of their life. And so it comes back around.

Diamond Stylz:

Yes.

Lexi Webster:

Every single time.

Diamond Stylz:

And don't be so arrogant to think that you know everything. Don't be so arrogant to think that you, you know, you have the answers. We all, including me, including you, we all have blind spots. When we think of recently, I, I went to Paris to work with a LGBT organization there and did you know that? Have you ever been, I what you think about this? Have you ever been on a elevator and you were anywhere near the weight limit?

Lexi Webster:

No,

Diamond Stylz:

Never in the United States. I have never been on a, on a elevator where the, I was any anywhere near the weight limit of that. There were, where we were staying, there was a elevator that was stopped working because you were too big and it, the limit was like 220 and I'm 300 pounds. And

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so that's a moment where somebody, unless you are a plus-size person, you wouldn't even think about that. This is a problem in this place. <Laugh>. Yeah. And so that's what I mean when I, when I came, when I came to Houston, I was homeless with \$57 in my pocket. Mm. I couldn't stay at the cisgender shelter because they said I wasn't a cisgender woman. I couldn't stay in the men's shelter because they said that because I had breasts, I could not, I could not, I was a liability. And if I got hurt sexually assaulted or harmed, I was a liability to them and I couldn't stay at the LGBT shelter. You know, Why

Lexi Webster:

Did you age out?

Diamond Stylz:

No, at the time I wasn't aged out. But that, that's what a problem too. But at the time, their funding only helped people with HIV and because I wasn't positive, I couldn't have a place to stay. And so here I am, anything from the LGBT, from the straights, from the CIS, any kinda safety net for me to benefit from that the government that my taxes <laugh> was cuz I was working to, that my taxes go to help. I could not use those safety nets to, to be able to actually have a home. So I had to sleep on another stranger, a trans woman that I met in a, a Black Planet chat <laugh>. That's how exactly,

Diamond Stylz:

And in a chat I had to stay on her couch. That is how community shows up for me. That is how the community showed up. And this, and I have had so many times in my past where it's the community that stands up and, and their mutual aid them having enough money to get me in a situation to help me out of my bind. And I wanna make sure that us as a Org at Black Trans Women's Inc. That we are stepping up to that plate to be able to use this money. We're getting, you know, 150,000 grants, 150,000 grants here, 25, 20,000 from this. How can we take that money and help the people on the ground who actually need our help? That's what you need to be doing as an organization.

Lexi Webster:

Yes. I I love that you ended this on a mandate <laugh> mm-hmm. <Affirmative> that you said, this is what we need to be doing. This is referring back to our other, the other piece of our conversation about like, what are we doing? What is our path forward? And yes, thank you so much. I I think that like, if you have any closing words for us, other than that mandate, I wanna open up the floor to you. Like if you have anything that like, is sitting on your spirit, please,

Diamond Stylz:

I wanna make this point. The reason that we see it is not a coincidence that where we see the most anti LGBT anti-trans laws and bills, the number of them, the states that we see them coming up in. When we think about Florida, when we think about Texas being number one when we think about Ohio, when we think about Louisiana, when we think about Georgia, when we think about these things, it is no coincidence that those exact states have the highest number of trans deaths in the past five years. It is. And Texas being number one where I'm from being number one, if we, if

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you calculate the Trans death, the states, Florida, Ohio, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas are the highest, have the highest rate of trans murders, trans deaths. And so <laugh>, it is no coincidence that that is happening simultaneously as these bills, these tons of bills coming across a legislative branch.

Diamond Stylz:

And so we have to be very, very clear that the, all these things are connected, those political things that are happening are also translating to when I'm riding on the bus and I'm sitting next to somebody and they are anti-trans, you are letting them know that they can bother me while I'm on my way to work. You are, you can let them know that you're letting them know that they can call me a a FAG, they can call me a HeShe, they can call me all of these things when I'm trying to go to work and be and contribute to the, the fabric of America, you are giving them permission and license to not see my humanity and not care about me and, and can do extreme harms to me. And so it's really, really important for us to make that connection because that is literally where our country is headed to. If we don't get it together and come together and work well, I, I feel like I'm sound like Claire Huxtable. If you don't get it together, Vin <laugh>, you ain't gonna see no kind another anywhere anyhow, <laugh> like, we have to get it together, y'all, we have to come together. We gotta put some of these identity politics down and actually see where we align, where we can work and create, multiple-faceted strategies in order us for us to get to another level in this fight. We got to organize better.

Lexi Webster:

That thing you were saying, I was like, ooh, how was like on the break of tears in New York as well? Like, doesn't matter where you are you could be walking down the street and get "tranny", "faggot". You can get what, I dunno if you have to edit that out, but we can get all of these things Yeah. No matter where you are. And, and certainly

Diamond Stylz:

We can't edit it out of our lives.

Lexi Webster:

Thank you.

Diamond Stylz:

We cannot edit. We can edit it here, but we can't edit that out of our lives. We have to hear it. We have to have the harm. We don't have to have it. But we, when somebody is given license to do that, we can't block it cuz we don't know it's coming. Sometimes we can't avoid it.

Lexi Webster:

Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> period. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Exactly. And we have to be, and we have to be telling the truth. We have to be doing truth-telling around the harm. Because I mean, if,

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if I self censor, if I self-edit, like it's, it doesn't, you know, it's not made clear that these are not abstract concepts. These are the material, material conditions of our communities. These are the ways that we live our lives every single day, either in fear of an anticipation of, or under threat of, the ways that we are made to feel precarious. So I'm so appreciative of not only that truth-telling that you've been able to so beautifully sum up today, but also all of the thinking about how do we convert that? How do we transform? Because if it's one thing we're going to do, it's, it's gonna be transform.

Announcer:

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