

Speaker 1: And the Black woman in front of him says, turn the shit off or get off the bus. And the brother whips out a gun and he blows the sister away. Is that resistance?

Robin D.G. Kelley: That's certainly self activity.

Speaker 1: You know, resistance for what? Right. I mean, I mean, I think that it sort of,

Robin D.G. Kelley: Well, but, but, but let's, let's, let's paint the portrait in a different way. The same, the same, the same incident. Those two sisters are resisting, you know, they're, they're resist. Well, what do you mean? So what, so what

Speaker 3: I mean, raised an important question here, because what you want to do is suggest if she wouldn't have made a point, the question pointed is suggest that these brothers getting on the bus with boombox represent some of, some resistance, some space. But she's ready because, so what, what does it mean when they blow the sister brains out?

Robin D.G. Kelley: It's vicious.

Speaker 3: Because no matter how you—

Speaker 1: That's what I'm saying. That's the dichotomy then between youth that are completely out of control and rebels without a cause and a group of brothers who are playing music that comes out of the same, the same core. Right. But music is actually about, and they perceive themselves as being resisters to systems of oppression.

Robin D.G. Kelley: But see, it misses the point about what the intention of music is. Because the intention of music wasn't to convince that brother to blow these two sisters away at all.

Speaker 1: No, no, no, no, no. I'm not using music is the excuse I'm using who they are. Right. And how they've conceptualized and formulated and constructed themselves. Right. Right. Are they, who in that situation? I'm saying who in fact is the resistor in terms of what you've been discussing, also in relationship to the notion of like, performance that you sort of laid out.

Speaker 4: And then even if you take situation, even if you take the illustration that you used, of the two individuals who went to court that they may very well have been trying to organize the community in a political way. But when they got in the court, you had the one individual with a knife who say, puts on the mask, and as you said, he was out the next day. And then you have the other individual who made no bones about the fact that he was out to try to organize the Black community. Now, it would seem to me that this

individual who chose to put on the mask was oppositional only when he felt that there wasn't going to be any say any, any punishment that as long as he's out there in the community he could be as heroic as he wanted. But then once he comes into conflict with the powers that be, he goes into this role playing it.

Robin D.G. Kelley: Yeah. But, but what I'm saying is that you can, by looking at that dissident subculture that's created, that legitimizes his role playing, that legitimizes his trickster attitudes, because there's so much evidence of people of, 'cause Black folks realize what he was doing. They weren't stupid. 'cause if they were, if they didn't realize that they wouldn't even listen to him when he went out the next day. I mean, the point is, is that by studying things like this hidden transcript and by seeing how culture of, you know, manifests itself in political action, then than being in trickster certainly makes more sense than going in front. In fact, the guy who went in front of the court and got six months,

Speaker 4: That's not being oppositional. That's—

Robin D.G. Kelley: Being conforming to the particular stereotype. It's being No. And therefore

Speaker 4: You are acceptable into a, you're acceptable. You're acceptable to the powers that be. Whereas the individual who's going to project this militant stance is going to be—

Robin D.G. Kelley: Prison in jail for six months,

Speaker 4: For six months—

Robin D.G. Kelley: And forgotten,

Speaker 4: Not forgotten by the people in the community.

Robin D.G. Kelley: Yes. That's what ended up happening in the context of, see, you gotta think about the historical context. This is the 1930s. In the 1950s, it made a heck of a lot more sense to go to jail, you know, to in the fifties and sixties because the moment had changed. The, the, the hidden transcript had, you're shaking your head because you're probably right. 'cause in some cases it didn't make more sense. But in the case of Birmingham in 1963 with, you know, operation confrontation, when you had masses of people who were not only willing, but you had TV cameras on you, it made more sense to go to jail in Birmingham in 1934 was to almost get killed or get your hands broken.

Robin D.G. Kelley: And Black folks in the community understood that Otis Debar Lemon was the product of that that that working class community, the other guy was not a product of that particular working class community. You see people who was in, in his community in Greenwood, you know, which is a kind of a industrial suburb of Birmingham, those individuals understood and respected him and understood what he was doing, because they would've done the same thing too. And many of them had tried to do it. There's a whole tradition of that.

Speaker 4: So then they were all not really all that oppositional.

Robin D.G. Kelley: Well, no, oppositional is not the same thing as saying revolutionary. I mean, I think that people are expecting, it's, it's kind of a lot to expect that any, any person who can be shot, beaten, killed on a whim, that somehow should be revolutionary.

Speaker 4: You need to talk about the trickster tradition.

Robin D.G. Kelley: The trickster tradition is a real thing. And it does.

Speaker 4: We write about the trickster. Well, yeah. Wouldn't subscribe to that. See, but for example, the—

Robin D.G. Kelley: You was gonna say something I,

Speaker 5: Your Birmingham 1930, 25 fine in 1930 was about the same as six months in jail. 30 cents a day.

Speaker 1: Send me to jail. (laughter). Yeah.

Robin D.G. Kelley: But, but, but, but see, but Ned Goodwin, who went to jail, spent a hundred dollars and six months hard labor. I mean, a hundred dollars and six months hard labor, you know?

Speaker 1: Would you respond to her question though? I mean, okay.

Robin D.G. Kelley: No, I'm, see, I don't, I think this, I think he, I don't want you to, to misunderstand me, because there's no way that I would suggest that killing two sisters on the bus is any kind of resistance. It's self activity in terms of that he's responding to all kinds of stuff, not just, and, and he's making decisions that are, are, we can say wrong, bad, horrible decisions, but it's not like he's not a self active individual. I mean, he, you know, he, he's self active and this is the vicious things that he's doing.

Robin D.G. Kelley: And, and in the case of a lot of the zoot suitors too, I mean, the zoot suiters were in some ways rebellious, but in other ways very reactionary as far as like relationships with women. I mean, think of, of Tiny Grimes singing—

Robin D.G. Kelley: Malcolm, you know, you know, well, and Malcolm's a good example for different reasons.

Robin D.G. Kelley: But in Tiny Grimes in 1943, sang a song with Charlie Parker on no, 1945 with Charlie Parker on Alto Sacks. And these things, "Romance without finance just don't make sense, baby, baby, please give up that gold. Romance without finance, you know, is a nuisance. Mama, mama, please give up that gold. You're so great and you're so fine. You ain't got no money. You can't be mine. It ain't no joke to be stone broke. Honey. You ain't lying."

Robin D.G. Kelley: So we're talking about someone on one hand is resisting some aspects, but see,

resistance is not pure. It's not, it's not like pure water. It's nasty. Sometimes a reactionary act. And this is a great scholarship of, you know, Paul Willis, A reactionary act can be resisting one thing, but undermining all kinds of stuff.

Speaker 1: I agree. I disagree with your, your, your primary formulation. I don't want you to think that I disagree at all, because I don't. Um I think what I the thing that I, I think I hear you saying, the thing that I think needs to be further further define, define really is, is really what it means to be resistive. . And what does it mean to be, because you see, if Black people we're not all pushing ahead, right.

Speaker 1: We can be a very, very, very, very reactionary people. You see what I'm saying? And, and, and I think that we have to sort of, sort of, sort of clear that out a little bit and talk about in what ways have, have some of us deviated way, way, way, way away. Anything that speaks about being resistive and progressive and forward thinking about where we need to arrive as a collective people.

Speaker 1: And what has become the most reactionary Lumpen part of us that really needs to be just as corrected as any retarded White person, or messed up Asian, you know what I mean? Because that's a part of who we are as well. Exactly. It's not this, everything that we do in terms of like, actions against White society, White people, Black people, is resistive in nature.

Speaker 6: Okay. Then answer that one. I think it's it's not only a matter of resistance but it's a matter of survival during the general strike. during slavery. I think sometimes we read politics and other kind of consciousness and things from our contemporary eyes. But if for these people in a hostile society, it was a matter of survival. It was a matter of not only of politics, but it was a matter of psychology. It was a safety valve like going to church. It was an emotional catharsis. That's how they kept their sanity to go to church, shout event and appeal it. This was an outlet for them. This was not all of it. So I think we, it was a matter of survival. And the other thing it was, it was a means and, and they survived by means of deception.

Speaker 6: A deceiving, the massacre deceiving the dominant of the oppressor.

Speaker 6: An interesting book, I think that some of you might be familiar with about Howard Thurman, the Great Black Mystic has written a book entitled Jesus and the Disinherited. And he says, this is characteristic of people who are oppressed.

Speaker 6: And he gives one story from the Jim Crow South in Mississippi where there was a a White policeman in one city in Mississippi, I don't remember the city, a small town in Mississippi killed a blind Black man. The man was blind and the police killed. The Black community was up in arms. It was very tense. And that, and when they had the funeral of the judge, the police, the posse, all of them were there because they didn't want violence to break out. So before the minister got up to preach, the sheriff called him aside and said, "Now, preacher is very volatile situation on you. It's tense. You are not, you can't preach, but you can give a central prayer."

Speaker 6: And when the preacher prayed, he prayed for an hour, and he said everything in the prayer that

he, he'd have said it was service (laughter), but the, the police could not arrest him because he was not talking to the people. He was talking to God. This was a form of deception, and yet it was also a form of resistance. So I think we have to look at that. I think we reading politics into it, which it might, we might read it as a political statement, but I think for many of these people, it was just a mere matter of survival. And I think this is an area that we've got to look at. In addition to saying that they were making a political statement that they were, that they were resisting.

Speaker 6: But it was by another example in the song is that when a White or a White woman, a Black person was working for a maid in a White woman's house, and she got angry with the White woman she was working for, she couldn't just come out and say, out of this, I'm not gonna take it, but she would stop singing. She was sing a song, you see that woman dress so fine, she ain't got head on her mind (laughter). That was her way of inventing her feeling and expressing it. And I think you've gotta look in the area of deception. Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

Speaker 7: Yes. Okay. In terms of the action that you're talking about, I think you have to look at it in terms of what, what are the goals and purpose in terms of how, in terms of this action and the strategies and so on, and whether it has been systematic and, and, and whether or not it's acceptable. And so over time, in terms of the protest individual acts approach, they've seen that there was a systematic way that Black people reacted in terms of those who consider themselves not in an organized group or organized form of protest. And so it has been documented over time looking at it in terms of different areas of states, regions or whatever that these people did. With poison the Master, they would break objects and so on. So you have to look at the goals and purpose and what caused that action, whether it was violent or nonviolent action.

Speaker 7: And also in terms of the saliva in the food, my mother related to me concerning people that worked in restaurant, that this was a common act when somebody, when the employer would come in there and they weren't getting just wages, or they were angry with a customer, they would throw meat on the floor before they were cooking, or they could spit in the food. And this was going on all the time in restaurants and so on. And this was stairway because they cannot just come out. They, because the other part of it was that livelihood was being affected, and therefore this act of protest was going on. And I was also the zoot suit. And I think when we look at material culture and say, these are the acts of protests, we also have to look at the roots of things too.

Speaker 7: And in terms of generally associated the zoot suits with the Puerto Ricans. And then when you look at Malcolm X, and even with my father, because he wore a zoot suits when he was in New York, and he conked his hair and so on. And this was a statement, as you said, socializing and being with the women and thinking later on, we come into the political statement because of, you have to look at what the action meant in response to what in the environment.

Speaker 7: And also, I remember when I went to the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, and I had on my little tailor made suit, and I was shopping in Sears. And and a White customer came up to me and she got very angry, "Well, why aren't you over here? And I want uh someone to wait on me. Why are you over there talking, socializing?" And I'm in there as a customer. And it was because I was

dressed professionally that that was not expected behavior on the part, as you said, in terms of working class.

Speaker 7: Then I went to the University of Alabama, and I was standing in line to pay my bill. And this is when they had this conference on southern women and so on. And this woman did this deliberately. She was sitting with her family, and she came up to me and said, "The floor over there ain't clean." Now I'm gonna tell you my reaction. But I knew that was her reaction of putting me in my place. And I was considered to be an uppity nigger. And this is the association, educated, well dressed, so forth, that you are outta your place and put the person in their place.

Speaker 8: I want add an additional point on the value, as I see this kind of, kind of a word is focused on the hidden transcript. I, I think that what, what one needs to be mindful of is that that this does not provide complete interpretations and that, that the value may be in, um supplementing other ways of trying to, to, to interpret events and, and, and acts. And as you were talking, I mean, this was very thought provoking for me.

Speaker 8: I was thinking of a, of a of, of a recent focus on the decline in the production of Black PhDs and the, and interpret explanation that's given, and the kind of evidence that, that that's used and how it, how it's incomplete. And the focus, particularly for me was is very important on production of Black PhDs because the period of time that, that the increase occurred in the late sixties, early seventies. By the mid seventies, I exactly coinciding with my own experiences in both undergraduate and grad school, and the period of time of the decrease at a time that I'm a professor that teaching Black students and, and observing what is happening as they move into that, you know, um leads something else to be explained about what was going on during those two periods of time.

Speaker 8: That, that your focus on the hidden transcript might help us to get at. For example, the traditional interpretation of, of the, of the decline is that there's been a a decrease in the recruitment efforts of grad students. The lack of availability of funding and the pool of available students are not there. What in fact is missing is an understanding of just who the people were, who were grad students during this time, and what were some of the experiences that led to their success.

Speaker 8: And I think this focus on the hidden transcript might help us to get at that, for example, just relating my own experiences and how I've talked to so many other people who went through the same period of time. And, and I'm coming to find that people have the same experiences. Give you one or two examples, brief examples.

Speaker 8: The bookstore. The bookstore was the library for us. Most of us had these limited fellowships. And we couldn't buy all of the books that we had in these classes. And, and, and it was intended, many of us saw for it to be that way, to get us in these schools coming out of the radicalism of the sixties, to get us into these graduate schools, designed for failure to prove that we weren't worthy in the first place. Particularly for those of us who came from from Black institutions.

Speaker 8: We weren't prepared, assumed to be, we were soon to be unprepared to make it anyway. And they were designed to, to fail. And they could say, see there, they couldn't make it when in fact, it did the opposite. It produced you know, probably the largest number of, of Black PhDs at any point in time in the history of higher education. But one of the things that we did, some of the things that we did were actually sort of acts of resistance and aimed at surviving. And in many instances, using deception, the bookstore was a place for studying. Um, I went to the bookstore regularly, and the bookstore was my reserve room, you know, and I would go, and I can remember being in Madison, Wisconsin, in the bookstore, and I would go there every day that I needed to study something that had the most recent books.

Speaker 8: And I remember once a bookstore attendant haven't observed this over, you know, several weeks. You know, this guy comes in, sits on the floor, grabs open 'em up. He studied particularly statistics. 'cause I needed to get different examples of the derivations and the notations were different. So I needed different books. And I would lay all my books out, and I would just go out and do my work. And finally, this attendant had the, had the property manager asked this attendant to do this, and I had a bigger beer. And you and I looked, and the attendant asked me, said sir, you can't do this. You're going to have to . You can't, you can't come in here and do this. And I said, very politely, call the police and have 'em to just drag me out because I'm gonna sit here and I'm gonna study.

Speaker 8: And went back to doing my work. And they never did anything. They never did anything. Another example, real quick, quick example was in learning how to use unit record computer equipment, for those of us who are from that period, you know that when you use the punch card, you had to have a card read. You had no idea to learn how to use the card read. You had to learn how to use the, the duplicate to duplicate these cards. You had to learn how to use the counter sorter. You say you had these big old massive machines. I'd never saw these machines before. , there were grad students who were advanced grad students, all White students who were really essentially competitors to us. And, and a part of this, um attempt to show that wWhiteldn't make it. And after all, we were sort of selectively put in there.

Speaker 8: And when they came from all these prestigious places where they were, they were, they were supposed to be teaching us how to use these equipments. 'cause they ran the labs. I would go over and they would consciously, openly, but in private one-on-one tell you, I'm not gonna help you. You know? And instead of us, you know you know, mounting a big protest. I, I mean, I wasn't in position, nor did I think anybody else to mount a protest against this kind of action. We began to do use sabotage. And one of the things I did, I bought a book that had pictures, and I used to go over in the evening and learn how to use these machines. And they were lack, they were even, you know, sneaker. And I finally, when I finally learned how to use these machines, you know, unbeknownst to most of them, because it was open 24 hours a day, and I would go into wee hours in the morning, I learned how to use these machines.

Speaker 8: All of 'em. I could use all of 'em very well. Not only I would do two things. One of the things I would do is I would go over in the daytime and jam all the machines. (laughter), you keep putting the entry key on the, on the, on the key punch. And all the s go there, no, in advance, those things were very expensive, could easily jam a count of salt. Most of the machines were very sensitive. I would jam all the machines. And to the, to the point where after I doing this for about a week, it, the snickering kind of ceased.

And apparently the people who had to get the machines prepared were very upset. So they would send people to meet me at the door, you need any help? You know, I can machine. The second thing I would do was whenever I saw another Black student come in and starting to use the machine and looking like they couldn't do it, I would go over and help them.

Speaker 8: And it got to the point that many of the people in the program thought that I worked there. You know, because I would do that. These were acts of survival and resistance. And I think for many of us, particularly coming out of the protest movement of the sixties, as radical students were found ourselves for the first time in positions of extreme subordination, and we figured out ways to resist, I think the resisting. And I think that it was gold directing. And I think that a case like this may be a better case for study, because unlike the situation of trying to deal with primary sources, we can using, using oral interviews, we can actually talk to people and document the extent to which this kind of, these kinds of acts worldwide. And, and we can do a more systematic effort. But I think it is important to understand the value of this kind

Robin D.G. Kelley: Work. Exactly. Yeah. That story has all the elements of, you know, what I'm trying to, to point out, especially like towards the end where Black students decided, you know, collectively we need to get through this. And you, you know, it's, again, it's not just the, the skin color that leads to collective action, but a shared experience, shared experience of being denied, you know, access to the machines and just sort of being mistreated as a whole. You know. Um,

Speaker 7: You mentioned that, um I want the question about this. I mentioned that in 60, that they used the term man in preference to, boy, well, how do you explain it in terms of the Sea Islands Blacks and the Carolinas, and also those from the Caribbean that they have a ion for them as the people in the sixties, because you, you get them all the time referred to, oh man, so and so, man this.

Robin D.G. Kelley: Probably, I, I don't, I, I'm not in a position to, to say one way or the other. 'cause I haven't really done the research on that, but I'm, you know, yeah, you have the voice, but but I, I would guess that yes, you know, in fact it certainly does have a certain kind of resonance. You are also talking about communities that are, but also refer—

Speaker 7: To females as men. There's no gender distinction in their thing.

Robin D.G. Kelley: Yeah. Some, someone who's like, who's a yeah, who's a linguist might say, well, you know, that's when you translate, you know, I guess you would know African.

Speaker 5: West African language. To what extent do you run the risk of getting someone indicted for the activities by interviewing that person in public?

Robin D.G. Kelley: Hey, that's—

Speaker 5: —Textbook White supremacy. The whole idea of maximum historic justice cannot be publicized, cannot be announced, cannot be publicized.



Robin D.G. Kelley: Yeah. It just happens. Well, what, what most of the scholars who are doing this kind of work, dealing with like recent acts, illegal acts generally just change the names of people, you know. I mean, I've, especially sociologists do this a lot, you know, they'll just use pseudonyms to protect people's identity you know, as one way to get around it.

Robin D.G. Kelley: And I, and I totally agree that oral history, in fact, I had a note here that I never did mention oral history is the best way to get at the self activity of, of peoples, with all this complexity and contradiction. Um, I, I wanna just clarify something. And that is, you know, because people resist specific forms of oppression does not always translate into anything progressive at all. It could be retrograde, it could be reactionary. In fact, the ability of it could be individualistic.

Robin D.G. Kelley: In most cases, it is individualistic the ability of someone to be able to you know, get more lard or more cornmeal or more flour from the welfare agent. You know sometimes might involve acts that, you know, doesn't translate into kind of collective justice at all. But, you know, the point is that, you know, your family counts. You wanna get more large, more cornmeal, more flour. So it doesn't always translate into these things that the problem of how to build a collective movement is another problem.

Robin D.G. Kelley: On the other hand, a collective movement cannot be built without an understanding of the hidden transcript. There's no question about that. You can't just go in there with, you know, a constitution in your hand and say, you know, these are the ideals. They're pretty lofty. Let's solve the problem. Every successful movement whether it's around evictions and stuff like that, have begun with this direct everyday problems of people.

Speaker 3: Yeah. I mean, that's all, I mean, that's all Marxist literature. So I mean, that, that's not anything,

Robin D.G. Kelley: It might be over, but—

Speaker 3: That, that, that's not new in terms of the concept or that you want to offer about looking at the private transcripts of Black folks, the idea of as, as the Marxist used to say, the concrete conditions of, of the masses.

Speaker 3: But my question, I wanna raise the question to you in another way. Um but sometimes Black scholars have, have developed various categories in trying to understand Black political behavior. And some nationalists, Pan-Africanists, Marxists, the radical, conservative, liberal, the point that they have developed categories as an effort to understand the different forms of political activity in the Black community.

Speaker 3: And, and how that not only related to the condition of Black folks, but, but as well as the goals and object. And more importantly, how those very ideologies you want call moment intersect with the state. We can all disagree with, with various categories. But my question is by, by your new emphasis on, on the private transcript of working class Blackness how would that intersect with those other kind of projects and efforts? How would that, in particular, looking at different forms of pop culture, dress and—

Robin D.G. Kelley: Right.

Speaker 3: How is that kind help us understand that?

Robin D.G. Kelley: Well, two things. One, it would show that none of those categories are entirely purely appropriate and that people come with multiple consciousness. You know, for a Black woman whose experiences are of, you know, as a woman and as an African American, as possibly as a working person too. I mean, the simple category of nationalists just doesn't always fit.

Robin D.G. Kelley: And sometimes nationalists has a patriarchal element to it, which affect or make difficult, you know, placing women's specific struggles within that category. And sometimes it's not silence, though, you know, if you would read the major documents by nationalist organizations in the sixties and early seventies it wasn't until a lot of Black women broke away from that and began to voice, you know, a kind of resurgence of Black feminism. It's not a new thing, it's an old thing, but a resurgence of it that you get to get that voice that was silenced in other documents.

Robin D.G. Kelley: The other thing is that it would also show how popular culture and cultural forms are so dynamic and historical and not static under any circumstances. I mean, sometimes we could sit here and talk about the conk as a kind of a reactionary hairstyle because it's straightening hair and, you know, and you know, that natural is what really counts, because when you're natural, you're like more African. But in the forties, you know, people weren't thinking in those terms.

Robin D.G. Kelley: You know, there are ways, and I'm not in a position now to interpret the conk or interpret the Jheri curl or any of that stuff, but what I'm saying is that these these transformations are always taking place in relationship to the broader confines, broader contours of, of American capitalism. And that's why African American styles are always co-opted, transformed, and represented to you always, every single, not just the zoot suit, but take the Afro.

Robin D.G. Kelley: The Afro was, was, I mean, no one could deny. I mean, a few people could deny that the Afro was intended as a really conscious statement. I mean, people said, so, you know, there's so much evidence of that. But then pretty soon Clarol came up with a product that can make your natural more natural, you know, I mean, in other words, corporate capitalism. And, and you know, Robert Allen talks about this in Black Awakening—is able to take styles that were meant for one purpose, turn it around and give it back to you, and it sort of loses its original intended meaning. And pretty soon people move forward.

Robin D.G. Kelley: Dreadlocks is a good example. Now, I had, I just gave a lecture to some high school students about the high, and we're talking about high top fades. We're talking about hip hop and whatnot. And a lot of them didn't know that the high top fade when, when it first came out, like on the East Coast, people used to use the term crown, and they used crown to sort of give back to Black males a sense of royalty. I mean, that was the purpose, the intention. And to also to to reject, resist the Jheri curl. Jheri curl was considered at that moment reactionary, especially considering that a lot of White people started

getting perms to make their hair look like a Jheri curl. Black people looking like, you know, with their hair straight, you know,

Speaker 3: Too expensive. Right.

Robin D.G. Kelley: It sure did.

Speaker 3: Right. Exactly.

Robin D.G. Kelley: Exactly. And it's amazing because, you know, my father would talk about having a bowl on your head and get your hair cut around, and then people go back to that. But then for these kids in 1991, they just thought the high top fade was a fad. I said, what, what kids would like consciously did this? How this, again, and I know you don't like this 'cause you know, you know and I'm not saying that though, having the high faith somehow leads to revolutionary activity. I'm saying that it is self activity that has to be understood and dealt with in order to understand the broader framework of why people do things.

Speaker 3: That's the key self activity that has to be understood. I think even when we look at the Afro and, and the way the Afro was coopted by, by the state and cooperative to assume maybe that reinterpretation of what that really meant. 'cause I remember, and, and so when we began to label those things that some form of opposition or resistance, it may be something else.

Speaker 3: And, and what you read, it seems what you are doing is reading into the self activity and giving it political meaning that I don't, that that's what we disagree. it represents something. But I think we disagree on the kind of political meaning you and important that, for instance, the Afro, the jeans at a certain point, that represented, anyway, a certain kind of political statement, but two or three years after the Afro, I mean, you know, navy said you gonna be Black and navy too. Jeans, the price, the jeans went up astronomical because the commercial world, they would co-op at for purpose and may in fact say something about the participants themselves in terms of how they really understood what they were doing.

Speaker 6: Represents what on Du Bois called the double consciousness. It's an identity crisis that African Americans have had when they first set foot on this country. And if you look at it, you, you look at the, the main meta officers of, of Blacks, Black people. We were Negroes, we were Colored, Black. Now we are African American. I mean, and no other, and no other racial group, no other ethnic group in this country has done through as many metamorphoses of name and am news report of one who was, who didn't want to offend any of us, had to write an article. And he wrote it this way, "A Negro policeman arrested a Colored man in a Black neighborhood." (laughter)

Speaker 6: But I think this is a part of that type of consciousness that when we look at the hairstyle change, and all of this is still a such identity that two of us that we encountered.

Robin D.G. Kelley: I, you, you, I know you had your hand up for a long time, so Yes.

Speaker 9: I want to thank you for giving me some justification for what I was ashamed of. I was a zoot suit wearer (laugh), and I had no idea making any kind of public statement. I had my knob shoes, my pimp chains, wide hat, zoot suit and had my hair conked. Now I conked my hair 'cause I saw a man called Cab Calloway called Hidey hidey ho. He could shake his hair over his head and throw back. And I did the same thing.

Speaker 9: Now, I did not impress the White community, but I certainly got first by the Black community. My mother made me cut that junk off my head, take that suit off because I was offending the Black community. So it's different from what I didn't know. I was making a statement, didn't intend. I wanted this make everybody's in the neighborhood.

Speaker 9: Now, something else, I rode the bus in Alabama, Birmingham from 53 to 55. And you compare that fellow on the bus got kind of loud to the Russian peasants in the, the go of 1970. And the Russian peasants had been fighting this brother for a long time since the Crimean War. But I remember, but one time seeing this man on the bus in Birmingham being loud, and he was not on the of offense to the White, he was also offensive to the Black people. , I do remember having to move that little sign up when you got in the back. And I remember having to stand in line while the heights got on first. I don't remember any cases of the, of the bus driver can guns. 'cause usually they call the policemen come in and register right at once, at once, violated the rules.

Speaker 9: But I'm concerned about using the exception to the rule for historical research. Now, we did a project, remember during the time of slavery, and we talk about the sabotaging and the plantation system by the, by the Black workers. When you change the labor to the sharecropping system, it's all together different because then you're gonna share in a profit, instead of trying to sabotage the main crop, you're going to try to make 'em produce more.

Speaker 9: But that was a theory that you read, but all the time, excuse the expression, but it's called peeing on the cotton. You hear that question. Everybody was saying that one of the way to sabotage the system, that the people would pee on the cotton.

Speaker 9: Now what I did, we had— I proved this not to be true. We simply plant two rows of cotton. I took a grad student, gave him a whole year. This job was just to pee on the (laughter). But let me tell you something. You know, any chemistry mm-hmm. Urine. Urine is really a fertilizer. The more you pee, the more you grow. (laughter) But scholar still say that the way you sabotage the system of you pee on the cotton. That's a lie (laughter)

Speaker 10: Peeing on the cotton is something different from what you describing here. You pee on your cotton at the time of picking so that you have a way of balancing the scale that has been already chipped, to cheat and you pee on it's wet when it's weighed, and therefore it's heavy and you get more in your weight.

Speaker 9: But scholars said it would kill the cotton. People seem to think that salt will kill something, but I'm telling you that salt in the proper propulsion make it grow more. And the scholars said that they were

peeing on the cotton so that it wouldn't grow and produce. It just died. And it didn't, it did not work out.

Robin D.G. Kelley: Well. The scholars were the ones who were wrong though.

Speaker 9: No.

Robin D.G. Kelley: And see, it, it's funny 'cause the scholars in this case are the ones who are wrong, who didn't understand what, you know, the sister here said, you know, well, Black folks did understand who picked the cotton. The other thing too is that the, the fact that there is this, this debate over the meaning of something is to me evidence, some evidence to suggest that, you know, we can't ignore this exception to the rules. I mean, I don't think that that, see my, what I started out here was talking about the oli whole idea of what's representative. And I don't think, like when, when people go back and do like African American political history, they say, well, what's representative are nationalist movements, integrationist movements, et cetera, et cetera. And they will tell me that for understanding African American history, the Communist party in Alabama was not representative.

Robin D.G. Kelley: I'm insisting that the Communist Party in Alabama had in the sharecropper union had about 10,000 members. And the international labor defense had about 3000 members. And the right to vote club had about 700 members. And the unemployed councils had about between 1500, 2000 members. And the party itself had a couple of thousand in Birmingham and a few spread out throughout Alabama. Now to tell me that, that's not representative, of course it's not every Black person, but not every Black person join an organization. So I'm sort of caught between trying to capture a segment of the Black working class self activity and politics, which is very relevant and deal with the facts. On the other hand that most Black folks didn't join an organization. I mean, no one, no one could argue that that, except for organizations that had sort of like voluntary elements, whether it's church groups, whether it's organizations that are not explicitly political.

Robin D.G. Kelley: And what I'm insisting too is that those organizations though not explicitly political, had some kind of, of meaning that had to do with the secular. And if it's something has to do with trying to transform the secular, whether you're successful or not, that's politics. You know, because I mean, when you think about how we vote when we go to the polls, are we voting for revolution? Are we voting for change in state power? A lot of times we're voting for things that affect us personally, individually. And if that's not politics, then, you know, nothing's politics. You see, and I'm not trying to put as much weight, like, you know, like I think that which is a matter of miscommunication. I'm not saying that there should be as much weight on those organized forms as these kind of everyday poses and these kinds of efforts. I mean, 'cause it shouldn't be. What I'm saying is that there's a connection between the two that needs to be explored. That's all I'm saying. And that, and the state obviously knows because the state puts more pressure, um repressing organizations than they zoo, than they do zoot suitors, you

Speaker 8: Know, some people just miss slavery votes as being significant for and worthy of study because the, the actual numbers, you know, vary in terms of how people report 'em. But it, but, but definitely the major slave revokes in that term and report were, were infrequent. But nevertheless, it does give us a sense

that there were actual acts of resistance. And so people focus on slavery, folks, the whole body literature, and they're more exceptional.

Speaker 11: And why these things are the exception now until we do the kind of research that you are talking about doing, we may find that they may very well not be the exception, but until we get out there and take a fresh approach to it, I think we're gonna be stuck with the same old traditional history that we have always

Robin D.G. Kelley: Done. Exactly. Exactly. In fact, when you made the remark about, you know, not seeing a lot of people resisting on the buses, what we might find in fact is that Birmingham is an unusual place. And World War II, we know was an unusual moment. But Birmingham, there's no question that bus drivers and streetcar conductors carried guns. I mean, that was like in all of the records and documents. And there was no question that 1941, there were 55 incidents of resistance around seating. Not to mention another 120 odd incidents that have to do with issues like being shortchanged you know, going out to the center door and just fighting on the bus. And I think that, you know, again, I'm not trying to romanticize African American opposition at all. What I'm trying to do is capture an element of working class self activity that's really contradictory, that's really complex.

Robin D.G. Kelley: Because again, the same people who sometimes use this one element are, are oppressing others. I mean, the same ones who are fighting for manhood, for example, know even the, like Black [indistinct] says, well, manhood is something that we need to get are the same Negroes who kept scholars like Anna Julia Cooper out of some mainstream Black scholarly organizations around the turn of the century. I mean, that's oppressing Black women's rights as scholars on the one hand, but insisting and resisting the dominant idea of what Black people look like in scholarship.

Robin D.G. Kelley: Those things are contradictory. But, but dang, you know, aren't we all contradictory? I mean, can we like do the kind of scholarship that would allow for contradiction, you know, that can understand both things that, that go against each other? I mean, that's, that's sort of what what I'm suggesting. And I think, you know, some other scholars are trying to do the same thing, you know? And I think that probably we all do it, not even know it, you know, in our scholarship.

Speaker 12: I want to ask one quick question. I know that back when you were a graduate student, this started out as something different from what it became, and, but yet I, I think it still has some relevance and that is in regards to South African Blacks and the Communist Party there. Just briefly, what do you think one might get out of this study in regards to that question?

Robin D.G. Kelley: Oh, in terms of South Africa? Yeah. Um, I, I should explain, when I started out on my dissertation back in the early eighties, my plan was to do a comparative study of the South African Communist Party and the Communist Party in, in Birmingham. And look at questions of race class and radicalism and South Africa, not just for studying Communist party, but just for studying African American opposition is like a good comparative example. 'cause you're talking about an industrialized country where, um African peoples, again, develop a dissident subculture from their own social spaces and bring that

whether to the workplace and public spaces and all these, a lot of efforts to study African politics. Sometimes they use this framework that's European and say, well, African politics has to be understood in terms of a left the right center. And the ANC represents the left, the, you know, the p a C is kind of a nationalist organization, but it's not that simple because you gotta understand the context.

Robin D.G. Kelley: Even if you take African languages, and you would know much more about this than me, but from what I understand in West Africa, there are not, there are no words that can translate into opposition party. And the words that often use are enemy. So if you're talking about you know, trying to build a two party state or multi-party state where the names of parties are, you know, enemy, it's like benefits.

Robin D.G. Kelley: Obicherry, who's a West African scholar sort of made this point to me a few years back, it doesn't translate the same way. Liberal politics doesn't work in a kind of West African context. And for us to, to say that we're purely American is to miss the beauty of Du Bois is double consciousness. You know, that we are African peoples coming out of certain cultural traditions and you know, we have, you know, adopted, transformed, interpreted elements of what we understand as American culture or White American culture too, you know, which is a hodgepodge of things.

Robin D.G. Kelley: So we're both of these things and sometimes they're contradictory, but that's okay. You know, whether we like it or not, historical actors are gonna move away that we don't like. And, and I think my job as a historian is to try to figure out, and in all of our jobs as historians, is to figure out how do they move and why, you know, what are the consequences of that movement?

Speaker 13: Okay. I think at this point then we have reached closure and on behalf of the institute, Robin, I'd like to thank you for—