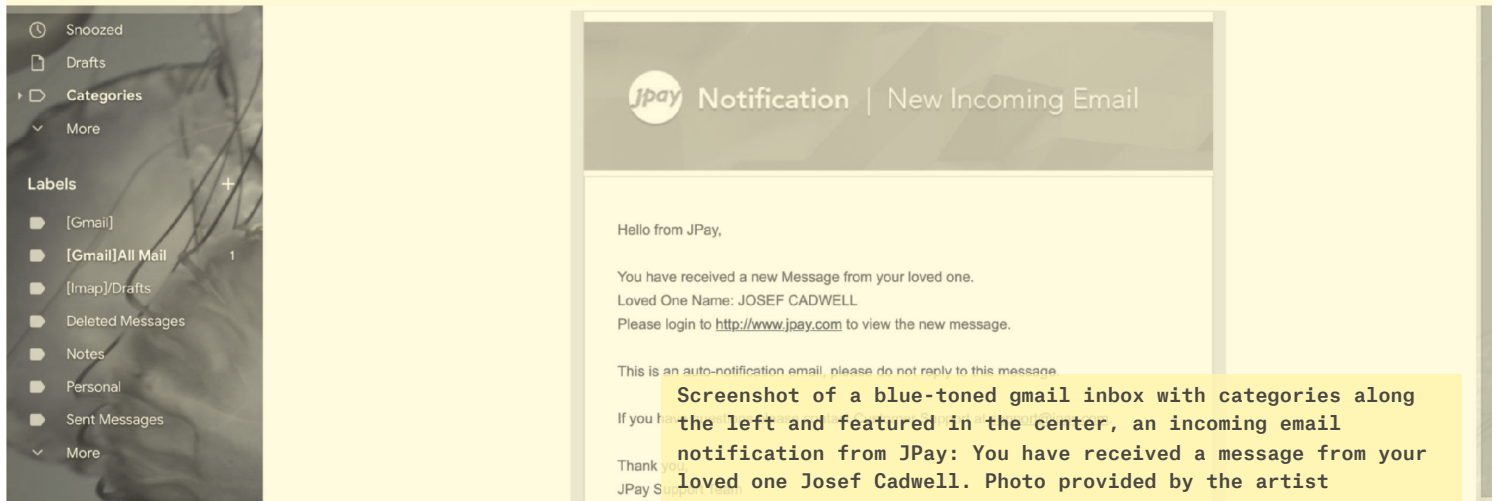


movement research



critical correspondence

about



CONVERSATIONS | MAY 10, 2023

Resisting the threat of violence: A conversation between Maya Stovall and Josef Cadwell

Maya Stovall
and Josef Cadwell

This *critical correspondence* is primarily composed by Maya Stovall. Her thoughts, insights, and commentary are interwoven with her brother, Josef Cadwell's poems and reflections. It is a correspondence, but their timeline is asynchronous. Their communication is dictated by the prison system and the surveillance, bureaucracy, and neglect this system rewards. Despite and through each challenge these siblings find each other and call out for a different way of being together, a more cohesive movement, a creative future—not fiction—that requires all of us.

—Londs and Nicole, CC Co-editors

March 10, 2022

Josef Cadwell:

C.N.F.

This is a story about a—prisoner—Man in prison.

This story is—non—fiction.

This Man belongs in prison.

Most of his kind belong there too.

This is fiction. This is non-fiction.

There is more to me than prison.

All I write about is prison.

I'm struggling to be creative.

All I feel is political.

All I write is political.

My Sister said sometimes

She can't tell if my essays are scholarship or sermons:

Way too preachy, mostly true, but contested,

and therefore—creative non-fiction.

I would like to write something personal,

but I'm a body in a cage.

That's only partially true.

I'm a black—body—human in a cage.

Taylor Johnson wrote a poem,

She or They pointed out:

Nothing is like a cage, but a cage.

That is creative non-fiction.

December 16, 2022

Maya Stovall:

I want to begin by quoting some of your stanzas from *C.N.F.* The depth and the urgency of this work sweeps me into a whirlwind of thought.

You wrote:

"All I write about is prison...I'm struggling to be creative."

This couplet is particularly striking because of its meta-operative model of engagement and embodiment. As you write this, I imagine you sitting in a cell, working on a tablet or a pad of paper, while the noise, smells, sounds, sights, (what could be called the affect of the prison) surrounds you. You are forced to embody the affect of the prison as you move through this space. There is no personal space, there is no property that you control, there is an affect of constant threat of violence.

As you write, you are creating, inherently you must be. You are contesting the affect of the prison and the lived experience of the threat of violence. There is no place to move, there is no space to go, where one can receive a respite. And yet in your writings, within your own thinking, you have located a space to reclaim movement, expansiveness, exploration, a sense of limitlessness which is nonetheless limited by material and technological surveillance, censorship, restriction, and control.

Critical Correspondence.

Through our own form of critical correspondence we are resisting the threat of violence and the repeal of liberated embodiment that you live through every day. Your reflections in *C.N.F.* are jarring—they hit me like a triple espresso and leave traces of acidic realization in that writing is a luxury and the most mundane act we are taking.

The *C.N.F.* you devotedly insist on writing, day after day, is a mode of survival. It is life.

The micromovements of our fingers and our wrists form a choreography across 3,000 miles.

The prison itself stands in our way, censoring emails, revoking phone and tablet privileges, and yet, you write on.

We insist on this *critical correspondence* and I copy and paste this conversation together as my heart races and my blood boils, because I know:

There is nothing more creative than this.

February 4, 2022

JC:

The Most Dangerous Place in Michigan...

I am often myself sitting with the feeling of being alone, isolated, voiceless. Prisons like this one I am warehoused in are dedicated sites of dehumanization and erasure. Redemption and healing occur not because of these prisons but despite them. The logic of racialized social control is what allows this dehumanization and hierarchy of humanity to exist. We must confront this enormity head on. Abolitionists must voice a feminist alternative machined in resistance to racism and white supremacy. In 2013 the Supreme Court quietly eviscerated the Voting Rights Act. Less than a decade later women in Texas and Mississippi no longer control their reproductive systems. The Supreme Court seems poised to further eviscerate Roe. Just as this system of white supremacy has claimed control of my Black Body, it is coming for your body too. The struggle to abolish racialized social control, to abolish the American carceral state is fundamental to securing the civil rights of all minorities and Americans. I call women and men to join in developing a feminist resistance, deconstructing the logics and structures of white supremacy and this hierarchy of human worth.

December 16, 2022

MS:

First, I miss you and I miss talking with you. With every piece of your work that I read, I miss you more.

Your February provocations on white supremacy's monstrous, viral nature and the future of Roe ring prophetic. On June 24, 2022, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health, 19-1392-57 U.S.*, the U.S. Supreme Court majority opinion (6-3) overturned *Roe v. Wade, 410 U.S. 113*, and revoked reproductive freedom. When I heard the news I wept, screamed, shouted, cursed, and was sick. I zoom out and float in the clouds. I see millions of little girls, teenagers, women, nonbinary children, teens, and adults who are able to give birth.

Author and social activist bell hooks turns our attention to the historical debate of reproductive issues within the context of a “capitalist patriarchal male-dominated medical system that controlled women’s bodies and did with them anything they wanted to (hooks 2000, 27).” hook’s analytical specificity is important because it spotlights the system of white supremacy that continues to proliferate like an infectious virus, devastating populations globally until we reach what would be the sixth great mass extinction. As IPCC and COP 15 data indicate, white supremacy—entanglements of detention, dehumanization, extraction, absolute control, and limitless profit—will destroy the earth and all its flora, fauna, plant, organism, marine, non-human, and human animal life on the current path.

I want to turn the attention to hooks’ prophetic reflections concerning the trajectory of reproductive freedom and its connection to embodiment futures discussed in our critical correspondence: “No feminist activist in the late ‘60s or early ‘70s imagined that we would have to wage a battle for women’s reproductive rights in the late ‘90s” (hooks 2000, 28).

I find intersections between the expansion and proliferation of the U.S. carceral state broadly and *Roe’s* undoing. The interpretation, the experience, the possibility of what it means to be able to give birth has shifted. As the carceral population in the U.S. continues to be devastated by Covid-19, human rights violations, forced and unpaid labor, and predatory corporate business model, the carceral population is expanding in novel ways. Persons with disabilities continue to face oppression and exclusion as the production of disability is central to white supremacist principles. Anti-Blackness and Anti-Nativeness continue to pose existential threats to humanity. Homophobia, Anti-Semitism, and Xenophobia broadly are increasingly normalized in a vicious white supremacist society. This is fascism masquerading as liberalism and the foundation of it all—unchecked white supremacy rooted in land and labor theft—and the theft of humanity itself.

The opening of our conversation with an analysis of fascism futures seems inextricably apropos.

Intersectional solidarity in a call for reproductive freedom, disability justice, racial justice, and feminist justice (liberation for all) will be required to move this mountain.

July 26, 2022

JC:

Reflections on June 24, 2022.

I was born in 1978. This means I was born into a country and a time where Blacks and Women had stronger legal protection of their civil rights than they do today. In 2013 the supreme court eviscerated the voting rights acts of 1965 eliminating many of the protections Black and Brown people have counted on to help (tenuously) secure their right and ability to vote. Less than a decade later the court in an odious decision has taken away Women's constitutional right to the privacy and ownership of their own wombs and vaginas. In effect abortion has been made illegal. Not only that but access to affordable contraceptive options, prenatal care, sexual health and reproductive care has been made illegal or impossible for many millions of women.

It is illegal to be Black or Brown in America. Now.

In 2022.

It is illegal to be a Cis or Trans Woman or a Trans Man in America.

Now.

In 2022.

Remember first they come for "the Blacks" and then they come for "the Gays". Then they come for you. We are not safe here. No one is. We must find something to unite upon and resist the reincarnation of American Fascism, racial and sexual terrorism. I'm calling for women to lead and show me, show us how to unite BLM with the struggle for Equality for Women and the same for our LGBTQ IA+ sisters and brothers and peoples. If the dismantling of voting rights laws and the reversal of Roe v. Wade is not enough to wake us from the dream of American exceptionalism and equality what shall it take?

If the laws that make it illegal to be trans or have transited a border do not wake us from our fevered dream of American exceptionalism and equality what shall it take?

That American dream has thus far always been a lie, on our best day perhaps a shaded half truth. In real time we are closer to Apartheid South Africa mixed with Modern day Afghanistan under Taliban than the nations we traditionally name as allies and peers. I wish to live in a country where it is legal to live in a Black body, where Women own their own wombs and sexuality and sexual identification is a free and legal personal choice. I say this as a believing and practicing Muslim.

I say that I do not want to force my ethics and morality (or immorality) upon anyone, nor this nation. Freedom is the right to choose how to live without the imposition of another people's arbitrary moral beliefs and practices.

Any woman/person has the right to carry her pregnancy to term. Yet this cannot be a decision that is forced upon any woman/person.

We must protest and flood the streets.

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Maya Stovall is an artist and anthropologist whose work is associated with the politics of space and place and the anthropology of white supremacy through video, performance, neon, and post-internet m...

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Josef Cadwell

Josef Cadwell is subaltern scholar, abolitionist, and feminist who welcomes dialogue with collaborators, critics, allies, scholars and creatives. Provocation of dialogue and political engagement leadi...

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