Feb 25, 2012 the Peace Islands Institute hosted Dr. Ellis-Williams for Black History Month on a PII Women Gatherings. Dr. Ellis-Williams explored some of the historical lynchpin ideas and resistance strategies (these include but not limited to Runaway, Music, Education- Intellectual Curiosity, Spirituality, Euthanasia, Wearing “Masks”, Writing, Oral history, Poetry/Dance/Art, Secret Societies, Coalition Building, and Quilting) that have shaped an *African survivors paradigm* . These powerful tools along with imagination helped position African Americans and African people in the role of active agents in social transformation within their own communities and also have set a standard for other oppressed groups across the globe.



She emphasized that we have to understand the significance given to margilization and subjugation put upon African people because it propelled the people to work to resist. This agency of activism has been possible in part because of the dogged determination to define and redefine identity, success, opportunity and the notion of “heaven” and “freedom”. Given the limited resources afforded them in this county it did not destroy or shatter the cultural belief in “overcoming”.

Commitment to liberation is rooted in lived experience—the personal is political. Audre Lorde states that:

“I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect” p. 40 (*Sister Outsider)*

W.E. B. Dubois asks us **What if,** we could free our minds what could be do? DuBois argues that there are things from both our African history and culture that must remain, that must never be forgotten, that need to under grid us. James Weldon Johnson, Ralph Bunche, Mary McLeod Bethune, James Baldwin, Marcus Garvey and Arturo Schoumberg, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and Walter White underscored the importance for making global alliances.

The night before King’s death he pushed for us to *“redistribute the pain… we are poor people, individually, … Never*
stop and forget that collectively, that means all of us together, collectively we are richer”.

Writers were critical of the status quo (Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, among so many others) understood the power of words and their ability to free the spirit, the mind, the burden and simultaneously quicken the heart to a new position, a new possibility. Even in the face of death, African people pushed back. Jamaican port Claude McKay (1889-1948) incredibly important contribution to the notion of survivor even in death is evident in his poem, “If We Must Die”

If we must die, let it not be like hogs

Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,

While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,

Making their mock at our accursed lot.

If we must die, O let us nobly die,

So that our precious blood may not be shed

In vain; then even the monsters we defy

Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!

Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,

And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!

What though before us lies the open grave?

Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,

Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Nina Simone’s song “Young Gifted and Black” message of encouragement to young people provides youth with a model for excellence and resistance. Marvin Gaye’s classic song, “What’s

Going On” challenges us to critically examine structural oppression, poverty and war. John Legend, (a voice for this generation keeps the tradition alive) with “Hang on There”.

African peoples and all oppressed peoples have a moral high ground and we need to remember this position. Mavis Staples, tells us in her penitent song “God is not Sleeping” that resistance is spiritually consecrated and validated.

Pictures from the event:





