We Rise Episode 7: Martin Luther King Jr. Day: Counter Narratives

Podcast Transcript

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HOST/CAT: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to We Rise here on 89.3 FM, KPFB in Berkeley, occupied Ohlone territory, known as Huchiun.

HOST/NICOLE: Good afternoon. This is Nicole Gervacio, co-conspirator for We Rise. Today on our episode we want to celebrate the legacy of radical organizing in this region and also call into question the false narratives that pedestalize certain leaders and organizations without acknowledging the ways in which they were problematic and even counter revolutionary.

HOST/CAT: And we know of course it's MLK Day on Monday, tomorrow, and it's 96 hours of action here in the Bay Area. And with this rich legacy, we want to bring attention to the stories, the narratives that aren't as well-known. So, we have two incredible guests with us here live, in studio, John Hayakawa Torok and Sulaiman Hyatt. Thank you both so very much for being here.

JOHN: Absolutely.

SULAIMAN: Right on. Thank you for having us.

HOST/NICOLE: Yeah. Let's start out with introductions. Can you please give our listeners a little background about your experience, how you got into activism?

SULAIMAN: So, I guess to be honest, I suppose there's two parts of that. There's the, you know, the born-black-type of thing where it's like, you're just thrust into whatever you want to call it, whether it be activism, movement, whatever struggle this, that. You know, you're just born into it. And so, before you're born, after you die, you're just, you're pushed in with that. I would say moment of conscious resistance, conscious activism, or the moment where I noticed the, you

know the systems of subjugation, I would most definitely put that closer to like early teenager years where I had that that black moment where some police officers decided to you know manhandle me, I suppose. And that was kind of that direct path. Yeah, the door opened up and that was a, that was my opening right there.

JOHN: This is John. So, for me, it had to do with, I'm the child of a refugee and an immigrant born in the USA on the 4th of July. My dad was a participant in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and came to the United States, and I grew up reading a lot of political stuff. I grew up mostly in England during the Reagan-Thatcher era, and so at that time there was an anti-nuclear movement and then there was this amazing peace encampment of the Greenham Common Women. So, even though I was in these very conservative and privileged milieu, I was hearing about this radical, anti-nuclear activism, direct action encampment to stop the deployment of US nuclear cruise missiles in England and in Europe. So, that was sort of coming to consciousness. The other thing was, because we moved internationally, I got to see extremes of wealth and poverty. And so, I found myself drawn towards a left analysis.

HOST/CAT: Thank you both so much for sharing those introductions. Building off of that, we'd love just to give even a little more context for listeners about the organizing you've both been doing. So, could you share just one of your own activism or organizing origin stories? There are so many ways to make meaning out of what we do and why. So, what else can you share, or what story, just one story about how you got more involved as an organizer.

SULAIMAN: John, why don’t you go first on that one.

JOHN: Okay. So, after college at Santa Cruz, I moved to New York for law school and took a leave of absence. There was a white supremacist, anti-immigrant terrorist group in New Jersey called the Dot Busters which was wandering around, beating up random Indian immigrant people. And a grassroots organization formed called Indian Youth Against Racism. And I became a

participant in that, and we did work to both educate the community and raise awareness. I mean it was a predominantly immigrant Indian community. And there was a generational thing with second-generation kids who'd been raised up, raised here versus immigrant parents. And there are different levels of understanding of the way the system worked that we navigated as well as the system, broader system itself. It was an amazing experience, these folks from 30-some years ago are still my comrades, although we don't see each other or talk very much. But it was a privilege and a blessing to be a part of a grassroots mobilization in an immigrant community.

SULAIMAN: You know, I've been involved with a lot of actions and campaigns and direct actions. I think I first want to open up by, one, giving thanks to the monumentous blessings of interacting with amazing people that have led me on this path. You know, I would most definitely not be here for those folks, and I'm looking at folks that are indigenous, you know black folks, POC folks, women, amazing queer people, and so on and so forth. Two of the actions that stand in my mind were, one, derailing the 2006 immigrants, or they called to immigrants, A Day Without Immigrant March, and this was in San Jose. And that was one of the largest marches the Bay Area had ever seen. The second thing was my work with the historic Bay Bridge Shut Down, and that was also very interesting. And I can go into depth of that, but those two actions are the two things that most definitely stand out in my mind among the things that I've done in my life.

HOST/CAT: Thank you so much. Yeah, I think we will definitely come back to that story. So, let's talk about the history of organizing and activism here on occupied Ohlone land. Born and raised here I always referred to my hometown as an epicenter of radical movements, which is an interesting choice of words considering we're on a fault line. Sulaimon, because I know you're also born and raised and grew up here, can you please talk about these radical roots?

SULAIMAN: Yeah, sure. And I know I might leave a few out here and everything, so I'm going to try to just skim through some of the things that are highlights in this historical narrative.

HOST/CAT: Absolutely. We're humbly offering the best that we can give right now.

SULAIMAN: I think first and foremost you had to really pay respects to the early struggles of the indigenous folks resisting Spanish rule. You're talking about like pre, you know US history right there, starting from like the west coast. And so, that most definitely would be included with that. And I look at activism in a very broad scope that includes militancy and resistance and self-determination and self-defense. And so, that most definitely hits right there. You know, pushing forward to that right there, you're talking about things around the silver rush, the gold rush, you know the formation of the modern state in California. And there's a colorful painting of resistance from folks with that. Most of the time we tend to start highlighting this around like World War II or we start that history of activism around World War II. But that would be a fallacy not to look at what happened pre that. Taking that into consideration, most people then point to things around the Japanese internment camp or Japanese internment camps and the resistance around that. And you're looking at also, you know longshoremen stuff that was – I'm sorry, that was pre-World War II. I'm sorry about that. The worker strikes, the resistance around that. That's also very monumental. You have the radical roots of the mass migration of black people from the south into the bay. And that caused the very interesting mixture of blue-collar workers that then produced this uniquely Bay Area flavor of militancy or at least that perspective of militancy even though some of it was most definitely posturing, you know to be real with that. And you also have things around like the gay rights struggle you know out of San Francisco. And I think at that point I just want to kind of really focus in and to say like, with the influx of black people and POC people and especially even migrant workers and you know the work around at the farm workers and things like that, you just have like a peppering of resistance, most of it not historically documented, but it's most definitely there. And you know looking hard enough and stopping to absorb that, you will most definitely put in the right direction in terms of your activism. Ignoring that, you know, you can step on the wrong foot in a sense in your journey, trying to

liberate one's mind. You know, you can dive into any one of those points, but I think that's like, you know I tried to give a decently well-rounded push with that right there. And you know, to really focus on women especially throughout these movements. Case in point, I'll end with this right here, when you look at the occupation of Alcatraz, most people point to the brothers who did the work in terms of the occupation. But it was actually the women who really set that up and kept that going and initiated that.

HOST/CAT: Thank you so much for naming that and we'll definitely as we get into sort of questioning the dominant narrative that honors MLK, and of course we know he's someone to be honored. But as we tease that, a part of it, we'll get into exactly what you're speaking to. So, for listeners, our dear guest, John Hayakawa Tarak does have to leave early, so I want to make sure you can hear from him before we move on to getting into some more of what Sulaiman just named. So, first of all, John, is there anything you wanted to add to what Sulaiman just said?

JOHN: I think it's a privilege and a blessing to be in the Bay and be able to work within these legacies. I really appreciate the opportunities to learn and to participate that this area provides, you know. There's a substantial contribution that the Bay has made, not only in terms of activism but in terms of intellectual production to the black radical tradition. And so, that's something I've been influenced by in my thinking and writing for a number of years. One of the learning edges to go to that question in the Occupy Oakland space, which is something that I was a participant in, was the question of the use of the term "occupy". And I was part of the queer people of color/people of color formation or committee within that that raised the question of, well, we're on occupied indigenous land. Also, the United States Empire is occupying Iraq and Afghanistan. So, what does it mean to claim, to occupy a space when we're living in the United States of America and at the heart of an empire? So, that was a critique that was brought forward by the queer people of color, people of color group within Occupy. And that became the Decolonized Oakland group,

and then ultimately there was a decision for that group, Decolonize Oakland, to become autonomous. There was a complicated discussion and a vote. And so that was one thing that may be of interest in this conversation.

HOST/CAT: Absolutely. So, just a reminder to listeners, you are listening to 89.3 FM, KPFB in Berkeley, which is occupied Ohlone territory, originally known and still known as Huchiun. I'm your host, Cat Petru. And my co-host is here today. Can you please introduce yourself again?

HOST/NICOLE: Hello, this is Nicole Gervacio, co-conspirator for We Rise.

HOST/CAT: And this is just for listeners, John Hayakawa Tarak who's been a longtime organizer. And we're speaking about the need to challenge the sort of great man narrative that informs, that can inform MLK Day. And we want to honor the many who fuel collective transformation. So, please go ahead, Nicky.

HOST/NICOLE: Speaking to your involvement with the local Occupy movement, can you speak about what remains of that movement today?

JOHN: So, Occupy Oakland is dead. Long live the Oakland commune. So, Occupy Oakland had its sort of moment really where it was very substantial towards the end of 2011-2012, I think. One of the things that was central to that organizing project was the idea that the General Assembly was not the place where the bulk of the work was done. And of course, I do not speak for Occupy Oakland. I speak as an individual who was a participant. People were encouraged to form autonomous groups and projects and work on things and then report back as they felt useful to the General Assembly. There were a number of committees that were formed and that became active and remained active for periods of time. So, while there is an ongoing vestige of the Occupy Oakland General Assembly that meets every Sunday at 3:00 at Oscar Grant Plaza, Franco Ogawa Plaza, it doesn't function as anything other than we share information about some activism that's going on in the Bay and then make announcements. So, it's fair to say that there are many projects and some

organizations that came out of the Occupy movement that are still active in the Bay, but there is no Occupy Oakland as such.

HOST/CAT: So, we know that our guest John has to leave shortly. So, this is something that we'll get into after our music break with Nicky and Sulaiman. Tomorrow as we know is the anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr's birthday, January 15, 1929. And there are plenty of places folks can learn about King and his legacy. So, let's contextualize this holiday. There's a reason to celebrate King, no doubt. But what vital truths are lost by magnifying him as a great man? Can you speak to that, John, before you take off?

JOHN: A little bit. So, the organizing that King did was both church-based and also within a space where, particularly a student organizing space to some extent, where Ella Baker played a critical role in training a lot of people to be active. Now one of my favorite, if I remember correctly, sayings of hers is, a strong people doesn't need strong leaders. And so, I think one of the things that in my work I seek to do, but also I think we were doing in Occupy was to encourage people to step up, take leadership, learn to be active participants in not just groups that they were a part of, but in movements for social justice. I think that that's within the tradition of Ella Baker. And it's one of the things that makes for powerful movements, is a recognition of the work that particularly people like Ella Baker have done.

HOST/CAT: Thank you so much. We are definitely going to be talking about Ella Baker later in the show. John, thank you so much for being here. We're going to take a music break and when we get back, we'll get more into this conversation. Stay tuned.

[Music break – "Black Girl Soldier" by Jamila Woods]

HOST/CAT: Hello, afternoon. This is We Rise on 89.3 FM, KPFB in Berkeley, occupied Ohlone territory, known as Huchiun. I'm your host, Cat Petru, and you just heard "Black Girl Soldier" by Jamila Woods. We're taking the opportunity

that tomorrow is MLK Day to call into question the presumption that a great leader makes a movement. And live, in studio, we have my co-host Nicole Gervacio, and we also had John Hayakawa Torok who just had to leave us. And our other wonderful guest is Sulaiman Hyatt. So, thank you for being here.

SULAIMAN: Right on.

HOST/CAT: So, did either of you want to say anything, following up with what we were just talking about before John left? So, the question was, I will repeat it, tomorrow as I mentioned is the anniversary of MLK's birthday, January 15, 1929. And of course, there are plenty of places that folks can learn about King and his legacy. So, like I just mentioned, we're trying to contextualize this holiday. And there's a reason to celebrate King, but the question we posed to John was what vital truths are lost by magnifying him as a great man and what other narratives can we tell? So, for folks just joining us, we were talking about this before the music break. And I would love to hear from Nicky and Sulaiman, your thoughts on this.

HOST/NICOLE: I'd love to share a little bit about alternative narratives. Earlier, you spoke about the farm workers movement. And actually, part of that story, that narrative, what inspired me was learning that the Filipinos were right along the Chicanos. My people are kind of invisibilized, the Filipinos. And to hear that they were right alongside Cesar Chavez was super inspiring. And so that actually got me trying to learn more about the history of activism out here and how my people were involved. It's great to see people that look like me doing the same work and to see that the importance in that movement was that they were overcoming that divide and conquer technique, right. So, Larry Itliong and Delano Manongs, stepping up and joining forces with Cesar Chavez and the Chicano group, it was just amazing to see that, by uniting together and showing solidarity, they were able to make this happen.

SULAIMAN: Yeah, no, legit. That solidarity and crisscrossing and intersectionality was very key and that's what produced many of the radical

movements that we have, including the Brown Berets and the Black Panthers, just to just to name a few. You know, those foundations were most definitely laid with that crossover right there. I know much that could be seen like in the LA region, you know as folks were being shifted around and moved, depending on where white people wanted to situate themselves. Yeah, very powerful indeed with that.

HOST/NICOLE: Yeah, would you like to share more?

SULAIMAN: You know, honestly, I think the first thing that I think about when I contemplate on this weekend is, you know I think first and foremost, for this week – I'm giving a big shout out to the folks who are on the ground, who are doing the work, whether it be through cleanups or church groups or whether it be acts of resistance or civil disobedience or direct actions. And I think, you know giving a shout out to some of the local orgs, APTP and BASAT –

HOST/CAT: That's Anti-Police Terror Project.

SULAIMAN: That's right, yeah. Sorry for my acronyms. I know, usually, like activists speak, we just shoot out acronyms because there's no time to say the whole thing anymore.

HOST/CAT: Yeah, many of our listeners probably are familiar, but for those who aren't, I just want to make sure they know who's doing the work right now.

SULAIMAN: Yeah, most definitely. And the SURGE is out there. You know, folks from BASAT, I guess. There's homies out there doing the work and –

HOST/CAT: So, SURGE is Standing Up for Racial Justice, and BASAT – I forgot what that stands for.

SULAIMAN: You know, that's a good question. I use the acronym so much that you actually do start to forget, you know, like just what it is exactly.

HOST/CAT: They can look it up. B-A-S-A-T.

SULAIMAN: But yeah, looking at the folks who are doing the work and, yeah, just to honor that, to honor the work. You know, some of my stuff with this right here was, or my early involvement was with BLM and the initial call-out with Reclaim MLK Day. And the reclamation of that I think is really important to look at, because you're talking about a long history of Martin Luther King's narrative being disrupted and retold in a way that is completely illegitimate. You know, so, to take that moment to try to then reclaim it for what it's supposed to be committed to, I think that it's really important because you know we can't allow other people to tell our stories. When you look at the base definition of what oppression is, you know you have to look beyond an occupation or violence or abuse. You actually have to look to the very root of that, and that very root of that is the controlling of someone else's narrative. And when you take it from that point and move out from that point, then you really begin to understand, you know you have the proper lens of that. And so, not allowing the states to tell that story on our behalf and taking that so we can tell that story is really important.

HOST/NICOLE: I have a question I kind of wanted to talk about a bit, how people use quotes from MLK to kind of tell people how to do their movements. So, for example, Black Lives Matter, people using quotes to kind of just in a way reprimand the Black Lives Matter movement for the way that they're choosing to demonstrate or organize. And do you have anything to share on that, like your perspective?

SULAIMAN: Oh, yeah. There's some really funny stories around that. So, when we – so here we are, like planning for the Bay Bridge shutdown. This was 2016, I believe. And we know full well that we're doing this to mimic the march across the Edmund Bridge you know from MLK and all the folks who did that. And the funniest thing is, here we go, we shut it down. After we shut it down, we get this slew of people coming out to be like, oh, what you did was just completely backwards, and you really shouldn't be doing that, and you should take examples from MLK. And we're just like we did actually. And I think one of the

funniest stories around that, I love telling stories around this, but the funniest story that at least by far that I have come across, was somebody was like, you know MLK wouldn't have done that. And I was like, well, you know, he actually did. And then the second thing was no, no, no, no, that's not what I meant. I was like, well what did you mean? Well, he notified the community through leaflets, the white community, that he was going to march across this bridge to shut it down. And I'm just like, oh my god, you're out of your mind, like you got to be completely out of your mind. You're telling me that Martin Luther King took time out of his busy schedule to write a leaflet to the white community to be polite that they're going to march across this bridge? I'm like no, come on. I was like really, I mean really, really rethink your position on this. And a lot of folks, like they don't understand MLK for what it really is. And I urge folks to challenge the narratives that they've been taught, especially in school and especially throughout high school and college, to really challenge that narrative. I mean, understand, like you know the last speech that he was supposed to give before he died was titled, "Why America is Going to Hell". I mean, does that sound like somebody who was trying to write leaflets to alert the white community that they're going to march across the bridge? Or does that sound like someone who was seriously fed up with the subjugated conditions of not only him but his people? It's really easy for folks, like I said, to fall into that trap, to that narrative. And it's an intentional narrative. It's not as if it happens in a vacuum. It's intentional. It was intentional to disrupt his life when he was alive, and it's sure intentional to disrupt his life well after he's dead. And we see that, and we see the disconnect that people have with that. And we especially see that with folks who want to jump up and critique and criticize folks who commit the direct actions. And to say, you know, we need to be patient, now is not the time. And the thing I shoot back at is the letter that King wrote from the Birmingham Jail where he criticized white liberals for their analysis on how my freedom needs, we need patience for my freedom. You know now is not the right time. But the reality about it is that you know that was like 70 years ago. And for people to keep repeating that, that oh now is not the right time. Well, when is the right

time? I think that's the big question that we need to be looking at. And then we come to the reality that folks who like to recycle the goobly gop of, you know be patient and, you know the system will work itself to your advantage, those folks, like I said, have fallen victim to that false narrative. And so, pushing beyond that, that's how we keep our eyes on the prize with that.

HOST/NICOLE: Speaking about how the stories have kind of been changed over the years about MLK and the way that he did his work, people often think of him as such a peaceful demonstrator when, at the time, he was disruptive. They did not think of him as someone who was peaceful. Would you like to speak more on that?

SULAIMAN: Yeah. So, that most definitely makes sense right there. I think speaking to how his story's been sanitized, and people often cite him as being peaceful. And I think, and I'm going to go a little deep right here. There are some folks out there, there are many folks out there that talk about, you know when they speak of him, they talk about King and nonviolence. And I really want to challenge that. I really want to push back against that. I think folks need to understand that, when we talk about nonviolent resistance, there's a context. There's most definitely a context. And especially folks who then try to link Dr. King and Gandhi to be like, oh yeah, you see these people committed to nonviolence to actually achieve their ends. And that's simply not the reality of all the situations. Nonviolence is a tactic to be used. In my honest opinion, and I think, and you know, to speak in historically nonviolence is a tactic to be used, and Dr. King understood this to a very high degree, because his life was threatened on multiple occasions. And many of the people that surrounded him harmed themselves. In fact, there's a really good book called “This Nonviolent Stuff’ll Get You Killed”. You know, the reality about it is that, when you live in an area in which people are not afraid, whether it be the KKK, are not afraid to come at you and to kill you, a great example would be in the case of Emmett Till where folks were just being, you know the folks would come in to drag people out their houses to horrifically murder them, when you live in areas like that, you

know you best believe, you know you need to come armed to keep those folks away from you. And knowing full well that arming yourself actually, I guess to use a play of words, that's what keeps the peace. To be plain, whitewashing that story to come at people who commit to militancy and especially acts of self-defense and using other black people and using other radical leaders to then attack radical movements is asinine. I mean it's ludicrous. And that is one of the definitions of being counter-revolutionary right there. It's shameful to try to use a false narrative of an amazing person and people and movements to attack movements of today. And to try to pull into space to be like we need to be nonviolent about this when you see people in other parts of the world that do not have that luxury of acting nonviolent, you know especially when you have the state that does not care for committing extreme acts of violence. So, and just to be clear about that, and I know some folks out there are going to point to – what's her name, that put out that book – Chenoweth, they're going to try to quote the book by Chenoweth talking about –

HOST/CAT: Oh, Erica Chenoweth?

SULAIMAN: Erica Chenoweth talking about, you know nonviolent struggle is what kind of gets the goods and everything. And there was definitely some real pushback about that and how she formulated some of her book. And that's another conversation right there. But just to be very clear about that, it's like, you know folks should not be using a whitewashed version of history to attack militant self-defense struggles.

HOST/CAT: Right. Thank you so much for naming all of that. You were, as you were speaking, I was remembering a film called “Concerning Violence”. It's based on a chapter from Frantz Fanon's “Wretched of the Earth,” and it's narrated by Lauryn Hill. It's an amazing film. You can watch it on Netflix. And it really gets into everything that Sulaiman was just speaking to. So, I highly recommend that if you have access to Netflix or know someone who does. And I really appreciate, again, these alternate, not – they're not alternative narratives. They’re truth. And as Nicky and I were discussing earlier this week, there's a

YouTube video that's a play on a song, and it's just like why are you always lying? And we know why there are people in power telling lies. And so, it's just such an honor and so important to be correcting these lies and unlearning the lies so that we can be seeding truth and nourishing the communities and the movements that are happening.

SULAIMAN: Is that song, was it, *[singing]* why you always lie?

HOST/CAT: Yeah. *[Singing]* So, one critique of movements of the past, the civil rights movement in particular, is that there was still misogyny within the movement. And presumably there was also homophobia, transphobia, and of course BLM, Black Lives Matter, has done an incredible job of centering queer and trans, black and brown women, or femme identified folks. And so, I just want to name that and discuss it a bit. And then also talk about the importance of accessibility and challenging ableism because that's something I so often hear left out of conversations like this. And then of course from the get-go we've been talking about the need for decolonization. But you know, in a time where it's unsafe to be native and it's unsafe to be a refugee, it's unsafe to – I mean anyone who has sort of anything but normalized or normative, like mental ability is – there's so many ways in which folks are targeted and oppressed. So, I just want to, would love to hear from both of you about how movements of the past did actually or didn't perhaps engage with these intersecting oppressions and work to make the movements in solidarity. And then especially, I'm curious what you see as the capacity for our movements of today to be decolonial, to be challenging ableism etc., etc.

SULAIMAN: Yeah, that's some good stuff right there. So, I think on the first part of the question, I have to really think back. Well, no, before I get to the first part of the question, there are two things that stood out in my mind, one being that whole Ella Baker thing, and the second thing being, you know how we're under constant attack, constant subjugation. And I know it's kind of easy to kind of slip into the whole, like you know, oh, now we're facing these things. Well, the reality about it is like, and especially since we're talking about MLK, you know

there are spirituals that were made around the hardships and the hard times that were going around at that time. You know, folks have to be like, oh, you know, Mr. 45 – I'm not going to speak his name on air – but Mr. 45 was, you know this is the worst, and da-da-da-da-da. And I was like, well there were people called Andrew Jackson. I was like, are we forgetting about these types of folks? You know. So, just like I said, just to kind of name that constant subjugation, and then in naming that, also kind of recognizing where, you know we're not – and I'm going to tie this back to Ella Baker right here – where we're not necessarily looking towards the monumental leader-like figures, but actually looking at, you know where maybe those folks that are kind of lifted up on the pedestals, what communities they came from. Because by all means, they wouldn't be able to have done what they have done if it wasn't from the communities they came from. And I think Malcolm X, for example, is an excellent example of this in which his aunt and family was really that support structure for him to go in the direction that he went into. And then pointing back to that, kind of bringing it more broadly to a communal level where it's like, you know if it's not for a community then you can't uplift certain people on these pedestals. And you talking about communities in a constant subjugation, and when you start diving into that, you start peeling back the layers where it's like, you not only have state repression, communal repression, patriarchal repression, misogynist repression from your own people and the most intimate of ways. And so, you start to just kind of dig in deep into that, you know the layers of the onion right there, and you get to the center point where you're just like, okay well, wow. You know, women and children have been going through this for a long time. And then you know you can start from that position right there. And then now pulling it back to Ella Baker who I feel is constantly, I feel people don't point to her often even though it's her work that is much of the foundation of what we have today in terms of like the, I don't want to say leader list but leader full movements or this section of the movement that we have right now in the continuation of this grand movement, this grand struggle that we have. When we look at the leaders that we have and everything, for most people it's very

easy to point to the men who have been doing the work. But the reality about it is that you're looking at people who were futurist in their own right and it's actually the women, you know. And so, that's really important to name and to point out. And for the Ella Baker thing, I think what we're looking at right now with this latest manifestation of where we're at movement-wise, we're looking at a situation in which people begin to move away from the grand leader, you know the person we have to point to, the Messiah-like thing or person that's going to lead us into the Promised Land. And we're starting to look more into like, well, how do we as a community move ourselves. And this was really a big shift from people pointing to, and you especially find this in like you know black radical politics or brown radical politics or people who were like, when the revolution happens, or in you know the case of, according to The Last Poets, when the revolution comes, the reality about it is that the revolution is not just going to come. There's no place of revolution that we're going to get to. Revolution and liberation happen within these spaces that we conduct each other or conduct with each other on an everyday level. We either choose, and I'm pulling from a really awesome professor by the name of Simmy who teaches in San Francisco State here, and this is something that we talked about, but it was we either choose to bring liberation or freedom into our everyday spaces or we choose to bring unfreedom and un-liberation into our spaces. And it is the process of bringing freedom and liberation into our spaces, into our interaction, into our intimate lives that actually creates that space, that conjures that space of the alternative structure that we're trying to reach. And these are the things that were predicted by the Ella Bakers where you know it's the everybody has to participate and be a leader in their own rights. And if folks aren't doing that, then the reality about that is that we're not bringing that freedom and that liberation into our spaces. And we look towards other people to take it upon themselves to save us. And that's just a really backwards way of producing successful movements.

HOST/CAT: Thank you for naming that and for gathering all the threads of the question I just threw at you. Let's take another music break in honor of Miss Ella Baker. Here is Sweet Honey in the Rock with “Ella’s Song”.

[Music break – “Ella’s Song by Sweet Honey in the Rock]

HOST/CAT: Welcome back to We Rise here on 89.3 FM, KPFB in Berkeley, occupied Ohlone territory, known as Huchiun. I'm your host, Cat Petru, and you just heard “Sweet Honey in the Rock” with Ella’s Song. I'm sitting here, in studio, with Sulaiman Hyatt, our guest for the hour, and Nicole Gervacio, co-host and co-producer of We Rise. And we were talking about Ella Baker and talking about how movements are formed by collectives of people, not just one great man on this MLK Day holiday weekend.

HOST/NICOLE: I would love to just share some reflections after hearing Sulaiman talk about that, how the revolution is not going to just be one quick moment, how we can't rely on a single leader or a few leaders to make that revolution happen. It's based on the community and everyday action and just the little interactions you have with people and the little decisions you make. Earlier when we were doing introductions, I wanted to share a little bit about my experience, my activism or activist origin story, and I really do feel like my activism was kind of in this passive mode, you know. So, I had these, I knew where I stood in my head. I was learning. I was trying to just understand how I could be involved, and so I was kind of you know an activist in my mind but not necessarily in my body, it wasn’t embodying it. And after college, I finally started to get more involved in my community, collaborating with people. And in the more recent years, joining Liberation Spring, the freedom school. And since then, I've been feeling like my activism is just integrated in my life. So, conversations I have with people, the food I choose to purchase, the places I choose to support. And also, I know that my activism, before it became, when it was passive, I was so isolated. I felt like I didn't know what I could do to help in the movement. And because it's more integrated now and I have community and people to collaborate with, it just strengthens that work. Because there are so many

things that I'm incapable of doing, but there's also so many things I'm capable of doing as an artist, as a dancer, as somebody who just wants to help other people who have strong visions or have the skills and have the community and have the tools to do things. I just realized that you know being a team player, collaborator, it makes things easier. It makes it less daunting.

SULAIMAN: Saying that actually I think is really important. And when I look back at all the things that I've done, I can easily say like I've led an exciting, activist life of you know being on rooftops, scaling things, getting arrested, evading arrest, blocking things and whatnot. And I mean like decent-sized things. So, I can most definitely say I have that excitement. And so, early on in my life I used to take it like, oh my god, if we're not going hella, if we're not going hella big, then we're just not doing it right. And you know, as I've gotten older, I really began to rethink how that operates. I think that that go big or go home-type thing is most definitely, yeah it comes from like me being a dude.

[*laughter*]

HOST/CAT: Say it. It's not your fault.

SULAIMAN: Yeah. You know, once I become conscious of it, that mostly does become a fault, so –

HOST/CAT: Fair, fair. Both/and.

SULAIMAN: But yeah, that definitely becomes, that's present. And a lot of folks like to jump into this struggle, in this movement, in a romanticized way, and so they posture. And many organizations, including the Black Panthers, were most definitely guilty of that posturing. And you know the reality about it is that the posturing comes from, like I said, being a dude. So, that's elements of that patriarchy right there. And then shifting away from that to like, well, what's happening kind of behind the scenes on stuff? What's happening on the everyday level? I know for me, for example, having my baby and kind of shifting, having a major shift in my social life and my ability to be out there doing the

things, and just focusing time and attention into raising a child and building new community around that child and going through the frustrations of, like oh man, I'm not doing the things with my comrades today. You know, I'm at home, baby raising, which I will be doing over this MLK weekend. I will be looking over my child and also his bestie. So, that's what's going to be happening.

HOST/CAT: And since when has childcare never not been a part of any struggle or anyone's life?

SULAIMAN: Right? I mean last I checked, it's like you can't have people on the front lines if you're not raising the children. So, you know it's like that's real with that.

HOST/NICOLE: Yeah, there's a whole spectrum of roles and work that needs to be done. So, even the big demonstrations and big showy things, which you know it can be it can be big, or it could be really small, and it could be – that's what I'm trying to teach my friends or share with my friends, because they're just like, that's not me, like I don't go to marches and stuff. And I'm like, it doesn't have to be a march if that's not for you. There's a time and a place. Find out what works for you.

HOST/CAT: Right. And that's one way that these narratives, these false narratives of what movements or liberation ought to look like can be actually so counter-revolutionary. Because if you have to be on the front lines every time, that leads to burnout, that leads to death. And that's not a long-haul sustainable movement for liberation. And also, we can talk about temporality in this, like you were saying before the break, revolution isn't something off in the future. It's how are we relating every single day to one another, to the earth, to our ancestors, to future generations? And it's nuanced, it has all kinds of emotional tones to it. So, it's a helpful reminder for all of us that it's not to say don't keep your eye on the prize, there's that amazing song, but do keep your eye on the prize and take care of each other in the process. And so again, hence the need to not pedestalize great leaders, but as Ella Baker refrained again and

again, that its each of us participating in a way that we hold each other accountable. We take rest, we nurture. We nurture. That's revolutionary. Do either of you want to add anything else before we stop?

SULAIMAN: Now you got me thinking about some stuff right now. You know, I think in evaluating how we reclaim our narratives and our stories, I think it's important to understand the systems of subjugation that we're up against and whether that be capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, misogyny, settler colonialism, and all the manifestations of these things and in its current form. You know, as you were saying, most definitely taking that time to preserve oneself, preserve one family, preserve community, and then pushing forward, to fighting tooth and nail to control our narrative and to tell our stories. You know, not giving an inch on anything and really challenging the myths that have been created by the states, challenging those myths in every form and shape possible. And it's hard, it's not easy because it really seems – you know, when people say like, don't you know that that's common sense. Well, common sense is the upholding and fortifying of those myths. And so, we have to be beyond that, we have to not be in a state of using common sense, because common sense is racist, common sense is sexist, common sense upholds the patriarchy. Moving beyond that, to, like I said, every day when we wake up, renew that intention to fight, like I said, and not give an inch, and just to have that intent and to try to have that impact in our lives. And sometimes it may not look good. Sometimes it may look ugly. Sometimes it may, we may feel defeated. Sometimes may be victorious. But every day we get to start that anew, everyday we get to push against it. And I'll end with this right here. There was an author, Taiaiake Alfred, that was asked, what does victory look like? And he responded, and he's a First Nations scholar and activist and educator, and he said, as we push towards decolonizing our communities and ourselves, the reality about it is that, if the next generation is less colonized than ourselves, than our current generation, then we're on a path of victory. I know that's kind of paraphrasing it right there, but the main thrust of that is you know it's not going to happen overnight. It's a long game, and it's going to take generations to cleanse

ourselves and to relieve ourselves of the poison that we've been ingesting for so long.

HOST/CAT: Thank you so much. Nicky, did you want to say anything?

HOST/NICOLE: No. He said it all. Thank you.

HOST/CAT: Are there any events either of you would like to signal boost right now?

SULAIMAN: So, there's the march happening on Monday. If you want, actually check out the stuff that's happening this weekend, do check out the Facebook, like you can go online on Facebook and look up the Reclaimed MLK Day in the Bay Area. There's stuff happening in Oakland and in San Francisco. And there's some movie screenings, and there's like the big march and rally that happens on Monday. I'm going to give a shout to my comrade from Abundant Beginnings, Shayna, who is among, with other organizations, are hosting a kind of like a teach-in. And they do this every MLK Day where they get the young kids from, like starting at like two and younger and up, to come together and just to hold that intention of educating the young ones. And so, they do this every MLK Day, and it's super awesome to see these little kids come up with like, you know do like art builds and banners and come up with statements and to be vocal about that and powerful about that. And that's really beautiful to see.

HOST/CAT: Amazing. Thank you so much for saying that. So, we are at the end of today's show. You've been listening to We Rise on 89.3 FM, KPFB, in Berkeley, occupied Ohlone territory, known as Huchiun. Please tune in next week for an episode of Feral Visions with Dr. Phillip Deloria on neo-colonial identity politics and playing Indian. And to speak to what Sulaiman was just saying, Nicky and I are stoked to have the Pink Panthers live, in studio, coming up for you in a few weeks. So, lots in store. You can check us out at Mixcloud.com/WeRiseradio. And if you have questions or ideas or want to

collaborate, email us at danceisrevolutionary@gmail.com. This is Sweet Honey in the Rock with “Ella’s Song”. Have a beautiful and safe weekend.

[Music – “Ella’s Song” by Sweet Honey in the Rock]