#1 The Blueprint

THE RADICAL SOLIDARITY OF DOLORES HUERTA AND HARRY BELAFONTE

> Too often it is assumed that change comes from above. Those of us who have been working against structural state violence, against over-incarceration, against police racism, know that these institutions do not budge—unless we push with greater and greater force and with ever-larger numbers of people. It is movements that lead to change.
>
> —Angela Y. Davis, "Transcending the Punishment Paradigm," 2017

The policing, caging, and public slaughter of black and brown bodies in the US continue to provide the world with coliseum-style American carnage through the lens of a cell-phone camera. The racial dimension of this pervasive violence is inescapable. As illuminated by the words of one poet: probable cause is probably 'cause you're not Caucasian. The daily news coverage of these public executions is focused overwhelmingly on the murder of young men and boys of color. Yet for centuries these acts of terror have also been directed against Black and Brown women no less deserving of our urgent attention and campaigns calling for justice. These women, often overlooked in efforts to call out state violence, have never ceased demanding this nation live up to its democratic promise. That promise made by a motley crew of self-described "revolutionaries"—who the British intended to hang for treason if their counterinsurgency prevailed back in 1783.

The irony of a once-insurgent American regime adopting the tactics of its predecessor is undeniable. In 1892 Ida B. Wells-Barnett documented

the public lynching of a Negro every thirty-six hours.[1] In 2013 the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement reported the extrajudicial killing of a Black person in the US by law enforcement and security officials every twenty-eight hours.[2] Despite the lack of any national database documenting killings by police officers, in 2015 legal scholars at UCLA's Critical Race Studies conference estimated these numbers exceeded 1,000 police killings for the previous year. With the latest totals reaching as high as three murders in a single day, who are the majority of those slain? Black and Brown women, children, and men.[3] Is the system broken? Did the American justice system fail Breonna Taylor? George Floyd? Daunte Wright? Ma'Khia Bryant? Adam Toledo? Sandra Bland? Trayvon Martin? Rekia Boyd? Tamir Rice? Ayana Jones? Eric Garner? Oscar Grant? Eleanor Bumpers? And this list could continue and fill every page of this book without being complete.[4] Or did it work exactly as it was designed to and protect white life, liberty, property, and privilege—at the expense of our dark bodies, descended from captives, taken by brute force, and regarded ever since as subhuman? The US Supreme Court has since its inception consistently allowed one's complexion to serve as "probable cause" to search, seize, arrest, incarcerate, and end the lives of those who are, as that poet reminds us, "not Caucasian."[5]

With more than a century of movement building between them in the justice system, Dolores Huerta and Harry Belafonte have spent their lives fighting. They are battle-tested activists who are now calling on the generations following them to "look where (we) haven't looked" and embrace more radical visions of change. In the summer of 2013, just three months after Huerta's eighty-third birthday, I sat with her, in awe of her work as one of the most influential activists in American history.[6] Born in New Mexico and raised in Stockton, California, Huerta began her life of leadership and organizing as a student activist in 1955. By 1962 she was organizing with César Chávez. Although his contributions have unfairly overshadowed hers by some accounts, they worked together as equal partners to found the United Farm Workers.[7] In 1965 she spearheaded and organized a national boycott during the Delano grape strike, leading to the organization of a worldwide boycott that forced growers to agree to some of the country's first farmworker contracts.[8] By 1970 this groundbreaking work resulted in the California grape industry signing a three-year collective bargaining agree-

ment with the UFW.[9] After decades of sacrifice, Huerta was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in honor of her impact as a labor leader and activist.[10] A proud mother of eleven, she courageously faced Teamsters on picket lines and survived being beaten nearly to death by the San Francisco police.[11] Huerta was the originator of the iconic movement call "Sí se puede!," a motivational call and response chant that was famously sampled and remixed by President Barack Obama for his historic campaign as "Yes we can!"[12] Few possess the vast experience and immeasurable insight of a life as committed to justice as that of Dolores Huerta.[13]

Among the "organic intellectuals" who has held a seat alongside Huerta as a long-standing colleague is a Harlem-born artist, activist, and son of immigrants from Jamaica.[14] On the verge of turning ninety years old when I met with both of them, Harry Belafonte continues to serve as a force behind liberation movements, including the fight to end mass incarceration in the United States. His lifelong commitment began at twenty-six years old when he was asked by an even younger Martin Luther King Jr. for assistance in organizing the civil rights movement. One of the world's leading Black actors of his era, Belafonte was also the first singer in the world to sell more than one million records—with his 1956 *Calypso* album and its unforgettable workers' anthem and lyric "Day-O." Belafonte leveraged his worldwide notoriety to activate influential artists including Marlon Brando, Sammy Davis Jr., and Tony Bennett to rally support for groundbreaking civil rights legislation. Years later, he brought Miriam Makeba from South Africa to the world stage while urging divestment to end apartheid and joined forces with Quincy Jones to launch a global campaign for African famine relief with the all-star collaborative song and music video "We Are the World." Not nearly as well publicized was Belafonte's response to Dr. King's call for resources when the assassination of three activists left the civil rights movement on the verge of bankruptcy.[15] With a mettle tested during his World War II military service, "Mr. B," as the next generation of artists and activists that he mentors affectionately call him, once even recruited his friend and chief competitor Sidney Poitier to help him deliver a suitcase full of cash to southern organizers facing death threats from the Ku Klux Klan.[16]

Both veteran activists, Huerta and Belafonte remind us that organizers of movement coalitions have a choice: to see ourselves as working to repair

and sustain broken systems, or to envision and fight for a fundamental transformation of structures that maintain the intersecting oppressions of marginalized communities. Rather than resurrecting the dead language of diversity politics, they challenge those historically oppressed and increasingly marginalized to reclaim and reimagine *solidarity* by forging relationships and building community through creative means. Witnessing the formation of today's movements, fueled by the arts, culture, new media, and technology, Huerta and Belafonte speak as visionary activists and lifelong rebels urging us to continue imagining new strategies. Challenging empty appeals to philanthropy that merely provide marketing tools for foundations and other institutions advocating *reform,* they push us to imagine and demand *radical change* that uproots white supremacist, capitalist, and patriarchal systems and institutions. As two of the world's most respected movement activists fighting for human rights and social justice, Dolores Huerta and Harry Belafonte have inspired millions around the world to critical reflection and direct action.[17] In the wake of the rise of Donald Trump to the American presidency, and amid a deadly pandemic for which the complete dereliction of his duties will be regarded by future generations as genocidal, it is all the more critical that this dialogue with Dolores Huerta and Harry Belafonte shares their unmatched perspective on multiracial solidarity and movement building in the twenty-first century. After this inspiring conversation with them, I was able to more fully grasp their call for a radical vision of justice and to understand how the work of movement builders requires critical examination by advocates, academics, activists, students, and scholars who understand, as Angela Davis reminds us, "It is movements that lead to change."[18]

Global uprisings are sounding the alarm in response to police killings, anti-immigrant violence, mass deportations, state violence veiled as "law and order," reinvestment in the racialized mass incarceration of the prison industrial complex, and growing white supremacist retaliation to #BlackLivesMatter, the Dreamers, the Dream Defenders, and the Water Protectors of Standing Rock. Huerta and Belafonte bring to this moment what only those who bear witness to the challenges and triumphs of movements spanning more than half a century have to offer. The historic conversation that follows calls on social justice movement builders to embrace radical solidarity between not only Black and Brown communities, but

between all communities marginalized, oppressed, or under attack: from women, immigrants, Muslims, and LGBTQ folks to those currently or formerly incarcerated. Huerta and Belafonte critique strategies dependent on the moderate support of philanthropy or the reformative measures backed by leadership within the nonprofit industrial complex.[19] As we witnessed a conservative neofascist regime rise to the highest office in the land, Dolores Huerta's and Harry Belafonte's unparalleled movement building experience spanning more than six decades, like their ever-evolving vision of transformative change and social justice, is needed now more than ever.

A DIALOGUE WITH DOLORES HUERTA AND HARRY BELAFONTE

BRYONN BAIN: The Cuban poet and revolutionary José Martí said, "To be genuine is to go to the roots; and to go to the roots is to be radical." It is my great pleasure and honor to be here today to *go to the roots* and to sit with two of the tallest trees in our forest.

So I want to start off by talking first and foremost about the power of the moment that we are in right now. A lot of the conversation today is focused on civil rights and the kinds of changes happening in the civil rights context. What do you think are the power and challenges of this current moment?

DOLORES HUERTA: Well, I really believe that we have a very extraordinary and a very great opportunity right now. Because what has happened with the Trayvon Martin case . . . as told in the movie *Fruitvale Station*—about the young man in Oakland killed by a transit policeman . . .

BRYONN: Oscar Grant.

MS. HUERTA: . . . shown all over the country. Great reviews. So I think we got right now for this particular moment; we do have the attention of the nation that is now focusing, for I don't know how long, but it's focusing on the fact that we have so many of our young Black men, and I want to also say Latinos, that are being killed by law enforcement. So I think that we have this moment right now that we can build on. And, as you

said, the New Jim Crow, but also the new lynching, you might say, of the young African American men and young Latinos.

HARRY BELAFONTE: I agree with Ms. Huerta. Let me first of all express my appreciation to the Ford Foundation for pulling this gathering together. And to you, Bryonn, for your art and for the work that you do. And of course, the extreme pleasure and joy to once again be sitting with Dolores Huerta. We've been on the trail for a long time and I got to know her in the best of worlds, along with César Chávez and the development of farmworkers in California, and the immense contributions that they made to the civil rights movement. And here we are some fifty years later, looking at the plantation and trying to assess what has the harvest really been or has there been a harvest. And this gathering gives us a chance to give a very swift overview of what we think on many of the issues that are unique to our time. I say unique not because the struggle is essentially any different. It's always the same rules, the same masters, the same themes, the same economics. Goals are set and people pursue them, much to the destruction of fellow beings, often in the name of a democracy, living freely and living to the best of our ambitions as a species.

What makes this unique is because there is Barack Obama. He is a bit different than what've had before. He gave us cause for hope, cause for opportunity and possibilities, and we, I think, endowed that moment with more than the moment was willing to yield. I don't think Barack Obama sees his governance in the way in which we would like him to see it. And I think the one essential ingredient missing through Obama's machine of a thought is that he has suffocated radical thinking. But he sits in harmony with many other forces that have power and possibilities that have also resisted radical thinking, resisted giving radical thought an opportunity to express itself openly and freely and to be discussed among honorable thinkers, as to what we can extract from one another and change the paradigm, change the environment that we find ourselves in.

I think philanthropy is a big part of the problem. I think what it does, and all the contribution made by remarkable young men and women who fill that culture and that space, still misses the mark because what we do not hear in America, what we do not find funded, what we do not

find being given the platform to reveal itself is what really other change thinkers are up to. What can the real change makers expect and whether they have to go once we fail to give them the resources, to give them the empowerment that they need.

I'm fascinated at the little titles we get: "post-racial" period. I don't know who makes these things up. And I spend a lot of time trying to apply it to something that I am familiar with and I find that I always fall short. There is no "post-racial" period in America. America has always been in a racial period, from the very beginning, from its inception. When the European conquerors landed here, they found people of color. And they found people of color that they did not embrace and did not give love, and they did not give opportunity to them. But they took the opportunity for their own fulfillment and their own mandate. And they crucified people in the pursuit of that sense of new history, and when they overran that population and genocided that culture, they went and got people from Africa. I cannot remember a time when America had an issue without being deeply rooted in race.

Race was not the only driving factor; it was mostly economic. Of course, we all know this. And in that economic context, we made racial definitions. Issues that face us are not just exclusively identified in race. It's also caught up in a lot of the class issues. And class is where we have great distance in any debate and dialogue. Even the titles of most of the philanthropies, Ford and Rockefeller and Kellogg, come from institutions that have had a great history of economic manipulation and oppression and rule-making that has not been always to the best interest of the human species. But in their names we now have philanthropy. And whether or not you draw a line between what we are permitted to say to them in the field of battle, we are now given the opportunity to say through their generosity and their benevolence, as we are constantly hunting for our way.

BRYONN: I would like to hear from both of you on that particular point, that contradiction. We talked earlier about this idea that "the revolution will not be funded"—some of the challenges that come with organizing community work, grassroots work, and linking with foundations. As we sit here in this space, I think that it's an important conversation for us to have. When we look at the movement today, what is the state of the

movement? Particularly with voting rights . . . and continued voter suppression around the country. Because of all these challenges . . . are we fighting some of the same fights? Or are we in some ways moving backward because of the challenges we're seeing and the contradictions we're facing?

MS. HUERTA: Well, the thing is, you cannot have movement without organization. When we talk about the civil rights movement and when we talk about the Montgomery bus boycott, that didn't happen spontaneously. That was planned years in advance, before it ever happened. And in the farmworkers movement, the farmworkers just didn't go on a strike. There were a lot of organizations; César and I organized for three years before that strike. I met with farmworkers at their homes to make them understand that they have power and that they can make changes and that nobody would make those changes for them, that they had to make those changes, right?

And we were able to organize farmworkers and pass a lot of laws to help farmworkers in California. By the way, lots of those laws are not in New York State. Forty years later, you don't have those same laws to protect farmworkers here that we have in California. But that took a lot of base building, empowering people. Oftentimes what happens with the philanthropy or foundation [is that] they'll fund a program, but you need to build a base first before you fund the program. They will not do that. And when the program is gone, everything is gone.

And that's what I think the foundations need to do. They need to fund organizing, just basic organizing, civic engagement so people can vote, so people can understand why they have to vote, why they have to stay on top of their legislators once they get elected. And this is a very basic step. I remember back in the '70s, Sargent Shriver actually funded community organizations all over the country from the government. This helped build the civil rights movement, and this is what we need.

You know, we can make Texas a progressive state in a year, or two years, really. You can do it. But we need people on the ground that would go out there and organize those folks out there and let them know that they have power and that they have to vote. And if we don't do that, you know, I'm going to quote [Venezuelan] President Hugo Chavez on this one. He said when he took over . . . "This is going to be an electoral revo-

lution." And this is what we need in the United States of America. We need an electoral revolution. Because so much of the racism that we have is institutionalized. I mean it's in the law enforcement.

BRYONN: What role does education—and *mis*education—play in this?

MS. HUERTA: We haven't even talked about education. My organization is working with the foundations right now. We are fighting on expulsions and suspensions of African American kids and Latino kids. And it's like the crib-to-prison pipeline. As Marian Wright Edelman has said many, many times. Kids are suspended and are truant and they go into the criminal justice system. This is very institutionalized, what's happening with our young people of color.

And this is where we have to start. We can address those issues there on the institutionalized side by taking power in terms of people that we elect to office. And then of course the other issue that we've talked about: how do we get Americans to understand that racism still exists in our everyday lives? When we talk about the immigrant rights issues, nobody talks about NAFTA. Why did all these eleven million people all of a sudden show up in the United States? Because of our free trade agreements, right? Allowing American corporations to go to Mexico and Central America and take over their economy.

Mexico now imports more corn from the US, then it goes to Mexico where corn is originally from. All of those millions of corn farmers: they can't compete with agribusiness in the US. So now they're here in the US because they're not going to starve. So we got to start looking at the big issues that really create the problems. A lot of this is strictly political. They don't want these eleven million people to become citizens because they're not going to like the way they're going to vote, right?

I mean the same thing with voter suppression. They're trying to make sure that African Americans and Latinos and young people don't vote for the same reason. They're attacking women for the same issues. Let's keep everybody distracted on women's wombs and the right to choose because we don't want people to look at the economic issues. What's happening over here when you got the one percent that got all of the money of the United States of America? We talk about the gay rights movements . . . the marriage equality movement. Why has this movement been so

successful? Because they've been out there organizing. Why have the Dreamers been successful? Because they have been out there organizing.

BRYONN: Ms. Huerta, you mentioned the placement of our elected officials into office using the vote. At the same time, we also have a history of elected officials not acting in a way that is accountable to the communities who put them in positions of power. The simple answer for that is organize and get them out of office. Mr. B, what are your thoughts on how the progress you fought for, over the last half century, now has folks actively organizing on the other side to peel that back?

MR. BELAFONTE: The question is very complicated. And there is no way to answer that will sufficiently explain. We can't fully explore the concept as we would like in these forums. More often we really get a chance to zero in on conclusions and ideas and thoughts. And I would recommend that we get off the sound bite culture and find a way in which we sit down and seriously talk at length about the things that bedevil us. But within the space that I'm given, more often than not, at this time in my life, I spend most of it among the young, and I spend most of it among the young who are in prison, and I spend most of that time among the young who are not only in prison but who are in the pipeline to prison. In the communities and [with] children and with remarkable people like Marian Wright Edelman and Connie Rice from California who are out there trying to stir it up.

And what I think I find myself doing more—not I think, but what I know I find myself doing more—is encouraging young people to be more rebellious, to be more angry, to be more aggressive and making those who are comfortable with our oppression uncomfortable. King once said that our greatest mission with our movement is to take those who are indifferent to our calls and to make them feel responsible to our goals and our choices. And he did that.

One of the reasons that was able to mature into the kind of movement we have was because we had these disparate voices, different voices, willingly merged with a vibrant energy about their cause. The American Indian Movement, AIM, and what they did out of a group at Wounded Knee. All of these movements had one thing in common: they had great radical thinkers at the forefront. And we have muted that seriously. And

I go around America, North and South, and say, Where are the radical thinkers? Let's have dinner. Let's just have an exchange on this to see if we even exist. And if we exist, what can we do to feel them or to fully give them the platform to say things the nation needs to hear.

When I grew up in the civil rights movement, I was an elder at twenty-six. I was an elder at twenty-eight really. I met Dr. King when I was twenty-four, but all the people around me, all the people in the movement—John Lewis, Julian Bond, Diane Nash, go on and on and on—were in their twenties or younger. Julian Bond was eighteen years old, Jesse Jackson was twenty. John Lewis was nineteen. I looked at all these young men and these young women, and the one thing that bonded us together was that we had radical spirit, and nothing stood in our way. We didn't need a press conference to state what our issues were; we were the issue and the press was required to come 'cause that's where the news was. [*applause*]

When I say to young people, I say you got to seize the moment, you got to make it inconvenient for those who find convenience in our oppression. And I think to a great degree philanthropy falls in that same cultural zone. We do great work, and let me not have anybody here feel dismissed or put upon because the goodness that you bring to the table is not being recognized. It's not about that; it's about the application of that goodness. . . . How radical is your commitment to hear voices that can really make change?

Any economy that requires cheap markets for that economy to thrive is already fully flawed. It tells you the story; that's what America thrives on. And the greatest hurdle for us is our loss of moral vision. We have no moral barometer. We surrendered to greed. We surrendered to our hedonist joys. We destroyed the civil rights movement and look at the great harvest of achievements; we had all the young men and women of our communities run off to the feasts of Wall Street and big business and opportunity.

And in that distraction, they left the field fallow. And our young people grew up in the midst of that. I'm amazed by how many young people I've talked who I've made great assumptions that they knew exactly what their history was, they knew exactly what went on. And how they opted not to deal with that information. But that is not true, they didn't have

that option. There was a calculated effort to redesign the way in which people thought and what the news media tells them, the headlines we put, the talent shows we put on, the talk shows, all of it is headed toward a vast barren field of greed and indulgences.

I don't know how else to put it. I think the only thing that can change that is to make getting to work, for a lot of people that work at Wall Street, a little more inconvenient. The movement made a social upheaval and you couldn't go anywhere without bumping into us, and what happened is that we have become a shadow of need, rather than a vision of power, forcing you to look or forcing others to look at what we need to do.

And the world has given us an opportunity, because it's not just about America. And the last half of the twentieth century when I went off to the Second World War, filled with the joy of democracy and defeating white supremacy and getting rid of Deutschland . . . and beating the fascist on the battlefield, being led to this sense of a new future. When the victory was achieved, we came back and we found the very things we were fighting for were the possessions of the "free world."

The "free world" was very busy with its colonizing of Africa, with its oppression, with its racism and its laws in America. And we came back; we had no choice: either yield to the status quo and go on with business as usual, or rebel, because that's what a lot of us who came out of WWII chose to do. And parallel to our thinking, here was also parallel to the thinking of the people on the continent of Africa who are also experiencing oppression and racial violence. And in Asia, hence Vietnam and Cambodia; there's great global upheaval around these class issues, and we are upon a time where we are forced to change. Good change.

I get too carried away. [*laughter*] But we were given the opportunities to look very carefully at the world we were shaping. But the more they threw money at our leaders, the more we gave them electoral power, the more we gave them Black Caucuses and Progressive Caucuses, they'd go sit in these tiny rooms and dance to their own melody. They completely lost sight of what's going on down below in the communities. And I had a gathering not too long ago where I brought all the Progressive Caucuses, Black Caucuses. . . . It was adult leadership. The voice. And we sat in the room talking about child incarceration, about the fact that our children were being put through this prison system. This new slavery.

And this little girl I just saw from St. Petersburg, Florida—five years old, in the classroom, being thrown across the desk and handcuffed by three white police officers. And to look into that five-year-old child's face and to see the horror. What bothered me was not just the image and the morality of all of that, but it was how this could be going on at such a furious pace. And to be so cleverly manipulated into our social fabric that the police have worked into our classrooms to settle questions that have to do with the fact that we have abandoned our responsibility to our children, to our learning process, and to throw all that into the hands of elected officials we have anointed with the responsibilities and solutions.

So we got into this discussion. We haven't even come to page one until that radical thinking and giving this an opportunity. I was not too sure I wanted to come here because, you know, I'm here begging these people all the time . . . writing proposals and recommending to others what proposals to write. But I am tired of begging. I'm tired of saying the same things. I'm tired of giving proposals, being sent back to read new criteria. You meet up in your boardrooms, telling the street how to shape our language so it will appeal to you, for your meager generosity. [*applause*] At some point, some way, somebody has to find out where are you relevant and why are you irrelevant . . . talk about where do we find radical thought.

I think lot of young men, and a great number of young women, are emerging. People in the community would say, Where are the young? The young have always been there. They have a voice. They have geniuses. They are better than SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], better than CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], better than SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] in our heyday. But they haven't been heard because there has been an option by the poli-elite to make sure those voices are never heard. They should be heard, and we play into that. We give them all the approvals that they need to think that they are doing good—and they're not.

BRYONN: I want to throw in a concrete example . . . Ms. Huerta, your son, Ricky Chavez, who is an artist, who is an MC, who is a hip hop artist. The kind of content that he talks about in his work—and we've talked about this, everything from pollutants to misogyny—these are not topics