

Text Transcript of “Off the Shelf” Podcast Season 2, Episode 1 with Ashley Howard

Augustus Wood:

Welcome everybody, back to the second season, first episode of “Off the Shelf: Revolutionary Readings in Times of Crisis.” I am so happy to be back here today, be back with you all. The first season was we promised to have more in-depth, new scholars coming out, emerging Scholars. But here's the thing, I didn't tell people to be prepared for one of my most anticipated episodes to start off “Off the Shelf.” And for some of you new listeners, my name is Gus Wood. I am a professor in the Labor Education program at the University of Illinois. And “Off the Shelf” is a podcast where we dig deep into the intellectual path or the or the investigative types of ways in which we want to understand the current social crises we face today.

In terms of what we talked about last season, we feel as though there is not necessarily a missing component, but that there's been overlooked aspects of the protest movements today, where we want more intellectual rigor. We want more scholarship, we want more in-depth analysis of how do we move forward both as Black people, but also move forward in academia? What types of circles, what types of programming, what types of curriculum? And what other types of just the university experience all together, should we be charting, to connect with the, to connect with interventions in dealing with social crises today? And so that's what “Off the Shelf” is about. And we want to make sure we let listeners know that we are sponsored by the Humanities Research Institute at the University of Illinois. And we look forward to an exciting season. And I can't tell you how just I've just brimming right now, because we have Dr. Ashley Howard here, a long time, just colleague, friend, just absolutely, truly amazing scholar in every sense of the word. And before I introduce her, I just want to tell I just want to say Dr. Howard, thank you for joining us today.

Ashley Howard:

It's my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

Augustus Wood:

So for those that don't know Dr. Howard, she received her PhD in history from the University of Illinois, and is an assistant professor right now at the University of Iowa. Her research interests include African Americans in the Midwest, the intersections between race, class and gender, and the global history of racial violence. She is currently completing her manuscript which analyzes the 1960s urban rebellions in the Midwest, grounded in the way race, class, gender, and region play critical and overlapping roles in defining resistance to racialized oppression. As an educator, Dr. Howard's primary goal is to teach students to be effective writers, critical thinkers, and engaged global citizens, and now you see why she's perfect for “Off the shelf.”

She is also dedicated to sharing her scholarly knowledge outside of the traditional campus community, including undeserved schools, and excuse me, under-served schools, and correctional facilities. Dr. Howard's work has appeared in the *Black Scholar*, *Time* magazine, the *Washington Post*, the *Financial Times*, NPR, Al Jazeera, and BBC World News, and numerous other popular scholarly outlets. So yes, this is the kind of juggernaut that is here for the first episode of "Off the Shelf." So Dr. Howard, the Black Midwest, oh, I'm telling you one of the most fascinating things when I first met you, when I first read your dissertation, was how you conceptualize the Black Midwest as this space and going through the Black working classes, something that we have often talked about, has not necessarily been the focus in African American studies or history. So can you talk to us...how did you chart your path towards the Black Midwest as being an intervention in your scholarly work?

Ashley Howard:

You know, I have a dear friend who often jo-... and I just want to again say thank you for having me. It's a real delight to be here. But I have a friend who once joked that "all research is me search." And I think in my case, that's really quite true. I grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, I went to college in Chicago. And that first summer that I was in school, two things happen. The first thing is that people were just blown away that there were Black people in Nebraska, right, they'd never heard of Malcolm X, they've never heard of Harry Haywood, they've never heard of all of these huge Black Nebraskans. That was the first thing. And then the second thing is that Mayor Daley had the first like, the inaugural One Book, One Chicago program. And that first book was Willa Cather's *My Antonia*, which is a story of, you know, life in the rural Nebraska, it's desolate, it's dark, people are just really struggling. So that's what everybody's perception of Nebraska was. That there were no Black people anywhere. And that life there was really hard. And that wasn't my experience. It was more nuanced. It was more complete, it seemed more of a part of the national discourse, even though we were never mentioned in these in these discussions, right.

The most people talked about the Black Midwest was the great migration to Chicago, and all the other number of cities that Black Southern folk came to were just ignored. So that was kind of my first beginning to think about this as a question. And then when I got a master's degree, I was taking a course on the 1960s. And we had to do a research paper. And I was trying to figure out what my research paper was going to be on. And I saw, one of the possible topics was riots, right. And I don't use that term now. But that's what it was on the list. And I was kind of going over it with my parents. And I said, you know, what should I do? And they said, well, you should pick up these riots. I was like, What? there were riots in Omaha? And they're like, yeah, and my parents had two very different perspectives of these uprisings based on their own race, class, and gender positions. You know, my dad was working a job, he was college bound and so like, he did not have this kind of sense of hopelessness and frustration that many of his peers did when they were going out and breaking windows and burning things down. And my mother is a white lady from rural Nebraska. And they came down to see what these people had done to quote "their neighborhoods," right as this cautionary tale. And so you know, this, this duality of both of them are experiencing these uprisings in very different ways led me to believe that there's something more going on, that there's this hidden history that we need to talk about. And then when I started doing my dissertation research, I found out by a small but significant majority, Midwest, or uprisings are Midwest phenomena, almost 36% of the uprisings that took place occurred in the Midwest. And so even

though these events are read, as you know, being these coastal, mega metropolis phenomenon, right, this is Newark, this is Watts, sometimes people talk about Detroit, but they never remember that Detroit's in the Midwest. That it's not only happening places like that, but it's happening in Omaha, it's happening in Des Moines, and it's happening Waterloo and Peoria and Benton Harbor, and all of these mid-size Midwestern cities, which is speaking not only to the fact that Black people over, although they're, you know, as a quote goes 1000 miles from Harlem, are still facing discrimination. But that this is not born from, you know, mimicry or trying to be like the big cities. This has been born from their experiences as working-class Midwesterners fed up with their existence, right? These are local responses to local conditions. And that was an epiphany to me.

Augustus Wood :

Well, that's the ... a similar thing happened to me in my research and looking at Atlanta. Because again, while you do Midwest, I do the South. But one of the things I came to notice is that the way we saw things when I was an undergrad at Morehouse was a lot different than the way we saw things when I came to the University of Illinois. Because at Morehouse, when you have a more traditional, necessarily kind of centrist-slash-conservative perspective at that school, from a lot of the administrators, etc., coming out of it, and being able to analyze the city in a much more critical way, from a different perspective with different resources, it looked a bit different. [LAUGHS] It changed my trajectory and how I saw the city. And so there's the fact that you have these types of gaps in intellectual history... Let me ask you this, because we often talk about this: What are the stakes of a Black Midwest intervention in African American studies? What is it, what is it...what will it do for us moving forward, and looking at where we currently are, and as we mentioned, the crises we face today? What are the stakes of this?

Ashley Howard:

I mean, like De La told us, right, "stakes is high." It's huge. It's huge, right? There are many stakes for many different stakeholders. And we can talk about this for people living in the region, we can talk about this for national global history. But if we want to start really narrowly, about thinking about the Black study, you know, how the impact is for Black Studies, it decenters urban history, right. And the Black experience becomes something more than just Chicago and Detroit and St. Louis, right?

Yes, we're beginning to see more critical studies done about Cincinnati, about Cleveland, Milwaukee—these are all kind of secondary cities that have been explored. But we get a very rich and different history when we start looking at the Black experience in places like Cairo, Illinois, right, which, you know, a fellow student colleague of ours, Kerry Pimblott, wrote. We get a very different picture when we start considering what it is to be Black in places that aren't even metro areas that are sites within the Midwest that are exclusively rural. This is important because the way that Black Studies has often framed itself has been that of a resistance to white oppression, right? And as we've seen in works like Clarence Ling's work, thinking that we need to look at the regional specificity, or Gretchen Ike who says we need to disambiguate the North, when we begin to think about these things, resistance will also look different when you have major institutions, you have some political capital, you have a diversity of

classes that maybe can underwrite some of these movements, versus you're one of 25 in a small community...versus you know that there is no city council rep, you know that you have no state representative. So these ways resistance begins to look different when we think beyond kind of the parameters of urban history, to smaller metro areas, and also to rural areas. And for me, even though I'm a scholar of racial violence, we also need to think about these moments where Black people are creating for themselves outside of the constraints of violence, anti-Black violence, and oppression. And I think the Black Midwest makes for a very rich, um, interrogation and investigation of these like, you know, moments of Black joy, moments of Afro nostalgia, right? And so we can think of places you know, like Idlewild, right, this is a Black resort, right? And these are the folks hanging at Martha's Vineyard, these are the whole strata, although you know, clearly towards Black middle class that we see. We also see you know, interracial unionism that is taking place along meatpacking, we also see things like, you know, in Omaha, this, you know, probably 50-year old celebration called native Omaha days, where Black folks who are Omahans come from across the country back to Omaha, to celebrate and to remember their upbringing. And so when we begin to look outside of these national narratives, and begin to focus on the smaller experiences, we get a really rich complexity of the Black experience beyond these, you know, very predictable and standard signposts of the Black narrative. And I think the other thing that is, you know, often forgotten, but I recently wrote in a piece is that, you know, these major Black cultural moments are being born in the Black Midwest, but they're adopted by America as a whole. When we think of funk, that's coming out of Ohio, we think of house music, that's coming out of Chicago, Motown, that's Detroit, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Toni Morrison, right? All these kind of canonical Black cultural texts are coming from a Black Midwestern experience. And that needs to be taken into account, that again, these are born from the conditions of the Black Midwest, that happened to speak to a National Black context.

Augustus Wood:

You know, that's one of the best things I think has come out of the last 10 years. When you put, when you supplement your awesome scholarship and what you're doing with what's happening in a place that nobody expected, kind of this this ignition of these deep-seated historical issues like Ferguson, Midwest, a place that hardly anybody knew about, a Black working-class town that suffered one of the worst deindustrialization waves of the entire Midwest. And this is what occurs there. And so I just find it to be so fascinating and so important that the type of history you're doing is so rich, because I argue that you can't do a lot of real study of the Ferguson uprisings without the framework you're presenting.

Because all of these things, the stakes matter and understanding the Black Midwest for why Ferguson working class residents attempted to build a movement against police violence and surveillance that was oftentimes wrapped in the causation of lack of jobs, poverty, housing struggles, etc., all these things matter. And what you're presenting, the culture of a Black Midwest, is deeply rooted in that. And so again, that's why I think that this this kind of podcast is important and why it's so cool that you're doing this work, is because we really can't conceptualize Ferguson without the intervention you're presenting. Now, there are others that are attempting to do something, and about other places, but nobody's looking at that. That is so fascinating to me. And so...

Ashley Howard:

Well... and you know, thank you. And it's, you can't start the story of Ferguson on August 9th, the night that Michael Brown was gunned down, right, the afternoon that he was gunned down, we cannot start that story. It's a much longer history of migration, about expectations, and about disappointment. And so I think about when we think of the Midwest, there are some really key moments in its framing. The first is that the Midwest is predicated on homogeneity, right? The Midwest thinks of itself as a white Christian cis place. Nobody's an outsider, nobody's an immigrant, everybody is the same. But they can only understand these white identities in opposition to the racial other, right? And we see this as early as you know, the prelude to the Civil War, that Midwesterners are like, this is a southern problem. That's not us. Don't come up here. And the moment that we see Black migrants coming into the Midwest, either in the, the decade before the Civil War, and in the decades afterwards, you see the creation of really repressive Black codes limiting what Black people can and cannot do in the Midwest region, right?

So everybody wants to wag their finger at the Jim Crow South, but the Jim Crow South learned from the Midwest, before Jim Crow was even named. That's the first thing. The second thing is that the Midwest was better, but not great, for Black people. And they have never harbored any, you know, delusions about that. It was this, the enemy, you know, versus the enemy, you don't know. And there's lots of discussion about, you know, in the South, at least, you know, where you stand, folks would call you the N-word to your, to your face, right? Whereas in the Midwest, it could be more fluid and sneaky and duplicitous. So that's the second thing that's going on. And the third thing, which you've alluded to, is that the Midwest was the canary in the coal mine for the post-industrial fail that we see of deindustrialization, mechanization in the 60s and 70s. And as we also know from history, Black people are the last hired and the first fired. And we see that playing out in full relief in the 1950s 1950s, early 1960s. In a place like Omaha or Cincinnati, you see deindustrialization, and mechanization, decentralization of these major factories, outsourcing them to smaller rural areas, or suburban areas, which because of other racist policies are largely white.

And so what we see in the beginning of the 1960s, which then is echoed in some ways in Ferguson, in the early 2010s, but takes a new tune, right, because history doesn't repeat itself, is that we have this, you know, increased expectations of a better life in the South with hope that you will at least have some parity with you know, jobs and wealth accumulation and home ownership that you can buy into this bootstrapper identity. And while Black people are buying into this bootstrapper identities white folks in power are actively undermining these opportunities and the stable working class to middle working class jobs Black people found in the Midwest are being yanked out from underneath of them. And so you see Black people in this context not have any recourse, right? The folks that are in office don't represent them. And if they get a Black representative in, there's shady business going on to change these elections from ward-based elections to at-large elections, they no longer have the power of the unions behind them, they no longer have the power as consumers to leverage. And so you have Black people increasingly desperate for a way to make their voices heard. And this is after, you know, 20, 30 years of organizing around civil rights issues, some of the very first civil rights, or human rights commissions they were called then, took place in the Midwest after racial uprisings, right? So there is a long history of Black people, in particular Black working class, people organizing in the Midwest, before we see the fires of the 1960s. So if you fast forward to Ferguson, you see the same theme, but in a different key, right? We think about the revenue generation that is happening in the town of Ferguson, right? Again, deindustrialize, but they need a way to generate revenue, and they're doing so by racist

policing practices, right? So they're stopping people, Black people and Latinx people, disproportionately, levying heavy fines upon them, which is then this background noise that Black people and people of color are constantly living with, when a teenage boy is gunned down into the street. So it's both the economic angst, and this catalyst, this spark of incessant police brutality, over policing, which leads to people taking to the streets.

Augustus Wood:

Very much so. And so in terms of looking at your period in the 1960s Black Midwest, in relation to the recent uprisings of today, where do you see the, where do you see the stakes and resources of last year, George Floyd protests in relation to... let me rephrase this... What is your take on the intellectual development necessary for a protest moment to a movement? If that makes sense.

Ashley Howard:

It does, it does. So one, for me, one of the most influential works in my own scholarship is Johan Galtung's work on cultural violence. And so he talks about it as a triangle or an iceberg. So at the very tip of the iceberg is the notion of direct violence. And that's what we can see: that leaves blue bruises, that leaves blood on the streets, that leaves dead bodies. Below that, right below the surface, are structural and cultural violence. And you know, in the past year, we've gotten really good at recognizing structural violence. These are racist laws, these are racist policing practices. This is predatory loans for homeownership. These are the way that the law disadvantages some people to advantage others. And that third kind of leg of the triangle that Galtung talks about is cultural violence. And that is what makes it okay to do the direct and the structural violence.

And so this is, you know, that the understanding that, well, if they only had fewer babies, or if they only tried to speak proper English, or pull up their pants, they wouldn't be gunned down in the streets, right? So it's justifying the disproportionate brutality that some Americans face. And so for me, that's so important, because in discourses in the 1960s, and then again, 2020, it seems that by and large, people are only caring about when rocks go through plate glass windows, right, at this kind of visual, direct violence, but if they really want to stop so-called riots, they need to abruptly disrupt violence in the structural and the cultural context. So this is what we see happening, right, is the the violent protests that we see in the street are responses to not only that direct violence, but decades of living through structural and cultural violence. So that's, that's one I think, is really useful to think about, you know, this context both in the 60s and in the present.

When we start to unpack Midwest, a scholar whose work I'm just totally enthused about, and I think is brilliant, is a scholar by the name of Brent Campney. And he has two books, one called *Hostile Heartland* and the other is *This is Not Dixie*. And I think his books are really great. And you know, both of these books are looking at like the the turn of the 19th century, so 1800s into the 19th century. And why I find his work so useful is because he's really beginning to unpack what I call my own work, the white Midwestern mentality, right? Which is something that very much pats yourself on the back, whilst ignoring the very racist and predatory practices that are going on. And why Campney's work is so brilliant is because he's talking about anti-Black violence, and the ways in which white Midwesterners

are justifying this anti-Black violence, and often blaming southerners for it. And so the South always becomes a scapegoat for the white Midwest that, oh, we're not like those people. And they can ignore the seemingly progressive aims that they think they have. And so that even though that's a historical piece, I think it begins to get at this racial tension that we see can't come to a head in the Midwest, again, this this promise of racial liberalism and inclusion, while ignoring the very predatory and racist practices that continue to undergird these societies.

And so those works, you know, are kind of my old studies, things that I love. But, you know, since Donald Trump's election, I think the Midwest is also really interesting to think about in some of the ways that transnational scholars are beginning to think about the Midwest. And in particular, I'm thinking of Edward Watts' work in thinking about the US as a colony, right? So the Midwest as a region needs to be read and interpreted in a certain way in order to make the nation feel better about itself. So I think about in, you know, if we even go back to say like Sarah Palin, talking about quote, "real Americans" living in the Midwest, and and the discussion of, you know, hard-working Midwesterners, erasing right, all the people of color who don't fit into this conception of Americans, doing this very careful excising of places like Chicago and Detroit and Omaha, all these cities that vote blue, to to lean on this myth of America of this pastoral meritocracy. And so this idea of the Midwest as a region to be like a museum piece, as Watts calls it, as this, you know, this Heartland, the very best of us that, the truest core, I think, is really an interesting frame to use to talk about 2020. Because we are at a crisis moment. We see, you know, a crisis on all sides, we see a restriction of what women can and cannot do with their bodies, we see a restriction of what teachers can and cannot teach in their classrooms, we see a restriction on how protesters can safely raise their concerns in a public space. And so this is more than just a cultural war. This is a battle for the very heart of America: who gets to lay claim to this country and the project that is American democracy.

Augustus Wood:

Yes, I'm gonna try to follow up that wonderful statement with another question that you really hit on that I've been thinking about for a long time. Let's go back to the cultural violence aspect—something we can oftentimes we can tie in another phrase I like to use with that: social humiliation. This idea that this select group of people deserve what they get, right? And if, and I tie it, let's let's dig deep into that in terms of the dialectic. As deindustrialization hit and the more subs, more low-wage service sector sub-working-class jobs became more dominant, and of course since 2008, you know, the data shows that over 90% of the jobs created since 2008 have been service sector low-wage non-union jobs... Martin Oppenheimer in his work on the sub-proletariat put out this idea that as a as a, as a demand for a sub-working class rose out of the reserve army of labor, you have to have some cultural violence from your, from the from the argument you made or, or some social humiliation propaganda to make it to where these people deserve to work in low-wage, low-pay work to suffer from these issues because as you mentioned before, they're too lazy to do better, they are too violent to do better, they are too culturally backward to do better. And so there's a dialectic in what happens currently in the Midwest and also, and I'll take it you've seen this dialectic in your work in the 1960s as well, correct?

Ashley Howard:

I do, so in talking about this social humiliation and the need for a sub-proletariat, my mind immediately went to Gilmore's work of *Golden Gulag* right and this need and so the prison labor, so that that is certainly one way that we can think about how this new class is. But this is actually a quite a unique difference when we think about prisons is that, you know, I was listening to Elliott Currie's book *A Peculiar Indifference*, talking about violence in Black communities, and said that prison and jails was not even an index term on the Kerner Commission. And so I think this is one way that we can begin to think about this creation of a sub-proletariat, you know, Wilson called it an underclass, you know, all of these types, right, and we can unpack, you know, that as well. But this is coming out of a notion of the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. And for me this very much ties to a neoliberal agenda, in which that, you know, if you just work hard, then you can make it through, right? This is the colorblind racism that is coming out of Nixon and Black capitalism. And, and these types of questions that, you know, really animate the excuse for the subhuman treatment of people. And not just Black people, right, of all people deemed less than, and then you can point right to the exceptional cases, you can point to the Barack Obamas, you can point to, you know, I don't know, in their exceptionality of what they can do it, everything else is solved. And that, again, underlies the structural and cultural violence. When racism went underground, you can no longer point to the man in the Klan hood as holding you back. And so we see people being blamed for their own inadequacies, ignoring the actual structural impediments to getting ahead.

Augustus Wood:

And let's flip that towards, back towards your work. Because what ends up occurring is this push towards in the rationality of social movement and rebellion, right? Because the argument then becomes is that if they deserve this, because you do have those... and again, I'm going off of the internal Neocolonial framework of Black people being colonized subjects that if they are acting this way, and they have one or two examples, than them protesting for a structural change is the irrational framework. A social movement, therefore, is irrational. And just as you mentioned, since they had and this is what the neoliberal project does, it says, since they have such a rich history of protests that have given them a civil rights bill, a voting rights bill, Roe versus Wade, all these, Miranda versus Arizona, all these things they've done in protest, and yet they still protest now, after they themselves have caused the conditions that they are in? Then what that does is, when you're trying to develop resources for a social movement, when you're trying to show the rationality of an urban rebellion, then you have the splintering, you have factionalism, you have more propaganda that goes against the very nature of fighting for that type of change.

And it goes into what you mentioned earlier, Dr. Howard, that laws become passed, or excuse me, laws are passed that curtail those types of rights of protests and rebellion, movement, action, etc. And so that's why I'm saying like the work you're doing in relation to the dialectic is such, has such a critical stake as you mentioned earlier, in the show, like we have to take the Black Midwest and its dialectical relationship to the under-development, the deindustrialization and also the struggles of the 1960s rebellions very seriously, and that they are not simply these urban phenomena, but they are consistent to the Black Midwest. And that these stories are what are going to teach us about how to develop a framework for understanding the present day.

Ashley Howard:

And you know, with the 2020, and I'll even take it back to Baltimore and Ferguson, right? We begin to see this tactical adaptation, and this tactical interaction that Doug McAdam talks about. So first is the, you know, the use of social media. And social media is so critical because it's a witnessing tool, right, you can actually film the truth that people of color have been telling about police for decades, right? You can see it live and in living color. It also becomes a tactical tool in that you can organize people, be at Mondawmin Mall, make sure you know, to bring milk for your eyes if you get tear gas. And you'll also see it as a framing tool. And I think this is really key. You know, particularly before 2020 there are a number of social media campaigns. So so you know, the hashtag Trayvon Martin the hashtag Rekia Boyd, right, that that's one form of that. You are linking together all of these people that are victims to anti-Black violence. But you also show the ubiquity of it, and and showing, you know, there were, there was a hashtag, #iftheygunmedown, and people would show an image of themselves, you know, as they see themselves in the military uniform and their cap and gown. And if they were killed by police, what the image in the media would be, right? And so we begin to see this dialectical shift in how people are taking control of the messaging. And I think that for me, is something that I really try to impart with my students is that movements aren't static. And, again, it's, it's been so fascinating to see my research change and people's perceptions of a change in you know, the oh 15 years that I've been working on it, right? So I started this as a master's thesis in 2006, um, and there was nothing, right, people thought that uprisings were the bygone era that was, you know, South Central after Rodney King was it. And then we saw uprisings in Paris. When I was finishing my my dissertation in 2012, I remember listening to my headphones of the BBC's report in London, after my Mark Dougan was killed there. And then we have the flash mob instances, which were not violent uprisings as we think about it, but they were groups of kids asserting themselves in a physical space where they're not welcome. Milwaukee State Fair. Chicago's Magnificent Mile. And so the discourse on this has changed because public perception of it has changed, and the efficacy has changed, right? The fact that we are even having conversations about defund the police, what was once thought of as a fringe idea now seems like common sense to many people. And so I think that this is an important shift. And when I tell my students that this is not static, the discussions at the beginning of Black Lives Matter movement arrival was like: this is not the way King did it, you need a leader for the movement... those discussions, that type of discourse has largely gone by the wayside. And we are hearing more of the decentralized, the local kind of organizing. And I think that again, to bring a full circle to what I said at the beginning, why the Black Midwest study is so important is because it takes local conditions under consideration, and it makes for more effective organizing. And I think that is kind of a really huge thing that we need to consider when we talk about place and organizing. And you know, like places in Iowa have passed laws that say that you, if you are a person driving a car who happens to go through a crowd of people who are protesting on a public fare-- you know, thoroughfare, that you know, like it is no longer a criminal offence. So now activists need to think about well, now where do we march? How do we be disruptive? How do we get people's attention? Similarly, they've made blocking a thoroughfare a third-degree felony, right? So because movements and the players' tactics and strategies are constantly changing, we always need to have our mind on local conditions and the way people locally can organize. And I would be remiss not to say here, again, although popular memory is already disadvantaging us to how we think about the summer of 2020, 95% of those demonstrations, which occurred in all 50 states, including notoriously racist places

like Pekin, Illinois, 95% of those were non-violent. And even that 5% that we need to consider, could often be described as violent because police and other law enforcement authorities read the riot act. So there may not have actually been imminent threat to body or property but because they were interpreted that. So I think it's really, really important to continue to remind ourselves, that yes, there are some very memorable images... I think about the police station in Minneapolis being burned down, right? There are some very memorable, visceral images, but by and large, these are protests of people from all walks of life, all races, taking to the streets, in numbers we have never seen before in his country.

Augustus Wood:

Very, very true. Very true. So, with that being said, where do we go from here? You know, so you know it's always interesting when we talk about, what's happening now in 2021 we see, you know, and I know people are aware but the writing has been on the wall for quite some time now in relation to the world issues, you know, the non-aggression pact was just signed last week between Australia and the U.K. and the U.S. and I think that's one of the most funny things... we're talking about the Black Midwest being a somewhat, shielded from history, or being overlooked, but who would have thought that Australia would be one of the most important countries in the world just out of the blue one day? But going back to what we were talking about, there's a lot on the horizon in terms of the crises that we are facing as Black people in the U.S., both locally as well as nationally and globally. And of course, you and I both know, I love your local perspective, it's actually influenced my own work and how I organize is through local means. And so in terms of where we're heading now, going off of the electricity of 2020, into 2021 and 2022 now, where do you see the moment to movement happening in terms of where we're going and also, my questions is because I always go back to this issue of, I'm not I'm not, beating a dead horse here, but we have to take critical study serious in movement building. With the just horrific assault on public education occurring at the legislative level, resources being taken out of schools, the, a lot of the stuff happening that we need, resources we need to continue that electricity. In your expertise on urban rebellions and movement practices, what is your trajectory, what do you see coming?

Ashley Howard:

So, as I joke, I don't have a crystal ball, so I don't know what's going to happen, but I know what I would like to see happen. I would like to see broad-based coalition-building. Both capacity and base building. So by capacity, I mean the classic resource mobilization theory. How do we have access to the things we need to make movements happen? Do we have burner phones, do we have office space, do we have someone who's willing to be our lawyer if we get arrested? And then also base-building, right? And really one thing I was so encouraged about in the summer was that the top ten book list for the New York Times all had to deal with race issues. And not all the books on the list were fantastic, but it showed that people wanted to read and wanted to learn. And I think that's something that is so important is that what we read needs to be critically consumed and understand its origins and its agenda. And I love Vincent Harding's work, that he, he gave a speech at the Institute of the Black World back in like 1978. It was published under the name History: White, Negro, and Black. And it's one of my favorite pieces to teach because it disrupts the idea that history is a neutral thing. History can be used to maintain the order, it can be used to repress and go backwards, or it can be used to be made forward. And so as we're making history, and... as are we moving this forward? Are we thinking of progress, are we just

okay with a little bit of expansion and keeping largely the status quo? And for me that is why base-building, broad base-building, is so critical, because we begin to connect these issues of structural and cultural violence, across elements of people who don't look like us, right? So we can think about Haitians being beaten on the border, we can think about Latinx people, we can think about trans people, all of these folks who find themselves in the cross-hairs of this prison industrial carceral state. And so while we may have different experiences with this, if we all band together to think about how its impacted us we actually have a greater position to bargain for. And that can't just be within our own national borders. And that I think is the other lesson from 2020. George Floyd's murder resonated deeply with the world and particularly people of color in the world. And so what are these systems of structural and cultural violence that are predating the predators against people of color and people on the margins throughout the world? What does solidarity with Uighurs look like? What does solidarity with Muslims in France look like? What does solidarity look like with gay people in South Africa? How can we think about the ways that people on the margins are all connected and how can we all work together to get free?

Yeah, and again, you don't have to have a crystal ball to put forth a critical analysis of where we're heading based off of the resources we have, the use of global struggle not just in the U.S. of course, but what's been happening in South Africa, the issues going on... I mean, Chile working class people, Chilean working-class people just finally got rid of Augusto Pinochet's constitution last year. Writing a whole new constitution after decades-plus of brutal oppression. And so again, as you mentioned, there's something bubbling at the center of struggle right now that hasn't crystallized yet, but as you mentioned, the building of a broader-based organizing model that encompasses all types of struggle that actually places an emphasis on intellectual development and critical analysis, you don't have to have a crystal ball to see that that is what is on the horizon. And it is our responsibility in pushing those things in that capacity. So I feel really good about this and I always do when you speak, because you're always so incredibly optimistic and honest. You know, you're a realist but you're optimistic about what we're seeing because you've done the work and you know who we are as people. And so I think that is the best way to end, easily one of my favorite episodes of "Off the Shelf: Revolutionary Readings in Times of Crisis" with Dr. Ashley Howard. Thank you so much for joining me, and you know that I'm going to have to have you back on here for a part two.

Ashley Howard:

I would be honored. Thank you so much, Gus, I appreciate our great talk today.

Augustus Wood:

Most definitely. And so again, make sure you tune in to "Off the Shelf," sponsored by the Humanities Research Institute at the University of Illinois. I am your host, Gus Wood, signing off, see you next time, take care, and power always to the people.

