

Lifting Up Histories and Futures: Educators and Students Speak!

From Classroom to Community

Join us as we discuss education as a means of resistance against institutionalized oppression

February 23rd, 2022 @ 7pm

On FB and IG Live @freeantphl

7pm 2/23/2022

Moderator: Gabriel Bryant - Ant Smith Defense Committee

Our Amazing Panelists:

Ismael Jimenez - Philadelphia Black History Collective

Chris Rogers - Paul Robeson House, Black Lives Matter at School

Melanie Osborn - YouthBuild Philly Graduate

Imeerah Tinsley - YouthBuild Philly Graduate

Transcript

7:00 PM

(Playing funky music)

Gabe: Peace everybody we are about to get started soon. Thanks for joining us for our #FreeAnt Conversation. Alright Alright Alright. Yes Yes Yes.

Chris: What up?

Gabe: Peace and love to everybody. We'll be starting shortly. We're waiting on everybody. Thanks for tapping in. Thanks for joining us. I hope everybody's having a good start to their week. We got a lot more work to do. Happy Black History Month and Black futures month as well.

(funky music continues)

Gabe: Love and light. Peace and blessing to the family. I love seeing smiles. It's good to meet you Imeerah and Mel. I've heard so many wonderful things about you. Everything's been amazing. I want to thank y'all in advance just for joining us. You are just...i can't say enough. You put a smile on my face just seeing yall so thank you.

Imeerah: Thank you for having us.

Gabe: Of course. Chris, you already know what it is my brother. You know what I mean...for so long. You know the brotherhood is real. Like I said we're waiting on one more...*(Chris holds up book.)* Yes sir. Yes sir. Yes sir. *(Laughing)* If you can, if you're just tapping in now. Feel free to put a #FreeAnt in the comments. In the chat, put a #FreeAnt. For folks who may need a visual

Closed Captioning we do have that available on the Facebook stream. So for those that do need that we do have the captions, we do have the captioning available on the Facebook stream, also @Freeantphl. So you can go there if that actually is better for you or anybody that you are with - any loved ones who are with you. You can get Closed Captioning at @Freeantphl on Facebook. Hopefully at some point they will be able to add that to the IG lives I'm not sure if it's there yet, but uh, it is available on Facebook. I'm not sure if it's there yet. So we are working to get one more person, uh, Ish. I think this might be Ish right there. Coming In. There he is! There's my brother. There he is.

Ismael: Peace y'all.

Gabe: How you feel, brother?

Ismael: Good man. Good to be in the space. It's my pleasure.

Gabe: Yes sir. So with that being said, man, now that everybody is here...We are right now..we are live on Facebook and we are also live on Instagram. First I want to say peace to everybody. Free Ant! My name is Gabe Bryant, brother Gabe. I work with the Free Ant Legal Defense Committee, on behalf of our brother Ant Smith and we've been working with these IG Live conversations since the Fall and we've been initiated as a defense committee since last year, really going on almost two years now. And the work obviously is not only to make sure that our brother Ant Smith can be free of his situation right now. But also to use this opportunity to engage in some, you know, dialogue and conversation with the community. Um that represents a lot of the ideals and issues and concerns uh that Ant, or to some Mr. Smith, or Mr. Ant certainly dealt with. So far, we've covered everything from you know, what it means to look at what activism looks like in the community of Philadelphia, and last month - mutual aid, to today, a phenomenal topic, of lifting up futures histories, lifting up history and really hearing from the classroom, right? With our teachers, our educators, and our students (*interrupted by background noise*) I think I'm hearing something in the background, so get that right. The goal really is to hit that for this evening. So, feel free to tap in also on the chat, to comment the entire hour. We'll be here til about 8 o'clock. We have some questions. But more importantly we do want to hear from you all as well as we tap in as a community and as a village. What I want to say first and foremost is to say that if you all again want to stay in touch with us you can obviously follow us, obviously on Instagram on #FreeAntPHL, um, but also on Facebook @Freeantphl. Currently his court date is set up for June. That may change, but hopefully it will not. So right now, we are pushing forward knowing that Ant Smith's case will be in June. And obviously we will be wrapping things up closer as we get with each week and each month towards June We will be building towards that momentum as a community, a city, and as a village towards his case. So we are really looking towards June as a great opening. But until then, looking forward to engaging in all those conversations. So really my first questions, and really I want to actually start with Mel and Imeerah if we could. And any of you folks can maybe start and maybe we'll start with Imeerah. You know, "What has it meant for you, and feel free to speak up as best you can so we can hear you correctly, but what has it meant for you to have

an educator or teacher like Ant Smith in the classroom? What has that meant for you as a student of his to learn and to kind of figure out life from him, Imeerah?"

Imeerah: It means a lot to me to have Ant as a teacher. He was not just my teacher. He's like a friend I can go to, somebody I know that can give good advice. He also like pushed me throughout school. Helped me with my graduation speech. He's a real person. He loves others. He helped speak up for things that you really wanted to achieve. Mr. Ant really pushed me to my best abilities for the class of 2021.

Gabe: And congratulations to you too, by the way! Congratulations!

Imeerah: Thank you.

Gabe: How bout for you Mel?

Mel: Um, for me, the biggest thing Mr. Ant taught me was how to use my voice. I'm very, like, shy and reserved. I never really know how to like, stand up for myself, or like, what I believe in. So, he taught me not only how to advocate for myself, and things I believe in, but how to do it the right way, by like, fitting to the facts of the situation and really feel empowered.

Gabe: I love that I love that. And I'm sure, Ishmael for you, as you hear that, as you hear, Imeerah and Mel talk about, you know, Ant giving them a voice, what has it meant for you, obviously so many years of being an educator in the classroom, and even outside of the classroom, you know, what has it meant for you, you know, being a Black educator in these spaces, you know, teaching for largely Black students, people of color, as an educator, taking on that role, what has it meant for you?.

Ismael: I mean, man, that's why I came into the game to begin with. You know, uh, when we talk about education, when we talk about what needs to happen, right, I'm one of those folks that, you know, came into education with eyes wide open about 13 years ago, as a teacher. But I knew I wanted to be a teacher at 16. I knew that, you know, the situation that we're facing, that we're existing in right now, demands folks that are truly dedicated, not to be you know, self-aggrandized, and do it for the dollar bills, or whatever, cause teachers don't really get them dollar bills, but more for the larger purpose of doing it for our people, man. When I was in school myself, I also struggled to kind of make sense of the world and the thing that got me through was reading books, being exposed to things that I wasn't being exposed in the classroom to. And I knew that all that I needed to do as an educator is tap that vein. Show the students the things that I haven't been shown in order to really truly keep up what needs to happen. And I think that really changes the whole conversation when we're moving forward. So even brother Ant, when he wanted - he was debating becoming a teacher at YouthBuild, and he hit me up, he was like, "Yo Jimenez, I'm debating doing this." And I was like, "Yo, I'm the first person, to be like, you already know the truth, burh. You need to get in front of students and speak it." And so, he came in my classroom, observed me doing it, and he was hype. And I was hype just to even have the man in my presence, cause our relationship was really just out in the streets, trying to do the real work that needs to be done trying to bring this stuff to people's attention.

Gabe: Yes yes yes. Thank you so much, Ish. I mean, I think that what you just said is so powerful because it shows the journey, right. The journey of, come with a thought. Let me observe. Let me get inspired and motivated. And now, I'm doing my own thing in own way. And certainly Ant is doing it in, you know, his own way. For you Chris, you know, you've done so much great work with the Paul Robeson House, West Philadelphia, but also, with, you know, looking at curriculum. We're talking about the efforts around Black Lives Matter at school. Not only in Philadelphia, but nationally. Talk to us, if you can, about the ability to offer not only critique, but produce curriculum that meets the needs of our people.

Chris: Yes, thank you and Free Ant! Happy to be here with yall. I wanna first lift up, that uh, yes I work with the Paul Robeson House Museum and I serve as the Program Director and also as the Board Chair of the Philadelphia Student Union. And recognizing how, just the powerhouse that Ant Smith is in the community, and in the classroom. We like, as soon as we heard, we were like, "Yo we gotta, you know, write a letter of support." So I just wanna give a shout out to the Student Union for fighting for Ant Smith's freedom.

Gabe: That's right.

Chris: And, yeah, the the curriculum work has been huge. The role of what we do at Black Lives Matter at School has just been about, you know, thinking of community advocates, folks like Ant Smith, folks who have been in the community that are reorienting what we think of as educational materials. When we think of the number of, you know, writings and, uh, Black radical texts, and new essays and new forums for conversation that are happening in our communities everyday, it's real wild that a lot of these things don't make it into our classrooms. So when the work of Black Lives Matter at School is looking at this moment, right, in our long history of struggle as people and saying like, "What are the tools, and conceptual work that is happening in the streets everyday? How does that connect with our longer legacy of Black resistance and how can we make that visible for educators, for students, for families, because we're all part of this legacy." You know what I mean? So, I brought a book that changed my life Walter Rodney's *The Groundings with my Brothers* here today. And I think, you know, that it really just speaks to what the need is. I just want to read a quick thing from *The Groundings with my Brothers*, and it's a misnomer, I mean he's saying Grounding with my Brothers, but there's also the presence of Black women both within the spaces that he's doing this work, but also people who are direct, you know, mentees of his, or that were mentors of his, so I want to name that. So he says, "Yo, we went outside the university and we talked to black brothers and black sisters and this, the society, this system, could not tolerate. Even more let us talk about the activities. I lecture at the university, outside the classroom, that is. I had public lectures. I talked about Black Power and then I left there. I went from the campus. I was prepared to go anywhere that any group of Black people were prepared to sit down to talk and listen. Because that is Black Power. That is one of the elements. Of sitting down together to reason, to ground as the brothers say. We have to ground together" And when I think of Ant Smith, I think of exactly that. He modeled that. He embodied that in his work and I hope as an educator that we can be sort of be seen together as one and the same, right, one and tsame number of folks who are doing this liberation work.

Gabe: I love that. I love what you just read. And I would be remiss if I didn't also mention that today is the birthdays of two giants in our history as we consider Black History Month and Black Futures Month. One being the great W.E.B. DuBois birthday is today February 23rd and also is the birthday of Dr. Amos Wilson. Two individuals in our history who were really critical towards liberation work. Imeerah and Mel, as you hear Chris and Ismael talking about, you know, just how resistance and progressive their ideas were in the classroom, do you have any thoughts about things you may have learned in the classroom that you were able to apply in the real life in the real world? And can you give us maybe like a couple examples of that?

Mel: Um, so, There was an assignment, we had to do a research assignment about like an issue we felt strongly about, and then find an organization that was working, like, to help that issue, and doing that research opened my eyes to, like, all the active organizations in Philly that are like this approach working towards something better for our community. And it inspired me to, like, also become ..it also become productive in the community. Ever since I learned about those things I've been trying to , like, participate in call-ins, and I try to donate to them. I share as much as I can on social media. And um, also, this Saturday, I volunteer at this really cool organization called the Block Gives Back and it really inspired me to get out there in the world and become part of the change.

Gabe: Love that, love that. How bout for you Imeerah?

Imeerah: Like what else could I do? He also was a hands-on teacher. He taught me to speak up for myself to achieve your goals. Like one way he did that, I wanted to be a chef. Like I have like real good culinary experience. He taught me how to put my food out in the world and be proud of my food, of what I create. He just taught me to give back, to like the homeless people, you know, just to give back because you know, people (*sound is muffled and cuts off*)

Gabe: Yeah, you know, if there's one thing, you know, and I want to stick with uh Imeerah and Mel before I get back to Ismael. You know, If there's one thing that you think that other young people could maybe think more about as far as really kind of taking hold of their education, um, what would you say? What would you say to - to somebody who's kind of wavering, or not really sure of themselves? You know what would you tell that person, who might be trying to figure out how to get back on track? What would you say to them?

Imeerah: To believe in theirselves. Like, you can do it! It doesn't matter, like, what you've been through. Like, I've been through so much in my life, but I like overachieved them. I used those problems to achieve my goals. Like just like, if you have a dream, just go after it. Don't be afraid. There's nothing to be afraid of. Like, you could always do it.

Gabe: Love that. How bout for you Mel?

Mel: Um yeah, I definitely agree with what Imeerah said. Um, I just kind of think like, rest is like necessary and like a lot of things that we go through like are lessons. So, um, I just try to think

of things that way. So I was supposed to be, like, every negative thing you go through, it's gonna be a lesson. So instead of, like, looking at it so negatively, you really just have to try to, like, take away the positives from the situation and figure out what you can learn from that thing.

Imeerah: Turn it into a positive.

Gabe: Yeah, you know, Ismael as you hear them talking about turning a negative into a positive and some of these ideas about, learning you know, what to do with your food. By the way, my sister also, um, does food work, so she's in bakery herself, so I see that connection with you as well, Imeerah. Um, but for you Ish, talk a bit about, because Mel mentioned about going out, and working with folks on weekends, and feeding folks, right? How else have you seen resistance played out in the classroom? Or other, like, radical ideas played out in the classroom? And how does that work for you?

Ishmael: Well you know, resistance in the classroom is basically teaching the truth nowadays, isn't it? What you see in the classroom is when students starts question the reality in which they've been told their whole life and indoctrinated with, by our society, the mythology of American exceptionalism, by uh even our parents, like the number one thing that you should care about is making a dollar bill and that becomes a priority. So when students start to question what they're being told and start to figure out this world, wait a minute, this world could be different. I need to put my hat into the game. I always told my students, if you're really learning in my class, you go through the 5 stages of grief. You know what I mean? First it's like Denial. You know what I mean? You aint, then you get a little angry about it. Then you negotiate the situation. Aw, I'll just move somewhere else I'll go to another place, right? And then you start to get depressed and feel sad about the reality in which its really starting to dawn upon you and then you accept. And so, I always tell my students that you go through this process continuously in the class if you're really, truly learning. Because we have to unlearn a lot of things that we have been told to be true. About ourselves. About everything. So when you start to see students start to like, "Wait a minute. I was watching this last night, and this is what they say. Or I was listening to this song and this is what they were trying to perpetuate and continue on like it's all good. When students did that, I knew that they were learning. And that within itself is a form of resistance because you know they're having that conversation with they cousin, their mother, their father, their grandparents, and then they're bringing that energy back into the school building. So I knew, around February, around March there's debates in the cafeteria during lunchtime, that started in my classroom involving kids not in the same class. And I used to love just going up in the lunchroom and messing with they heads and just jumping in and saying, "Hey, are you sure about that?" And playing devil's advocate because resistance is more than just like a certain path, right? It's a certain - it's more of like the ability to take in critically what you're being fed and then put it through a certain filter. And that within itself, takes students to a whole nother level. I actually, on the way to where I'm at tonight, I ran into a student on the subway and she called me over and her friend that she was with was like, "She always talk about what you talked about in class" Mind you, I taught this child 5 years ago. And so I know that folks are doing the work, right? Because, even if, listen man, the reality is, when folks in the classroom, they're trying to figure out their own reality, right? And of course, we need adult

guidance and everything like that, but then also at the same time, I have learned so much from the folks I've taught. Where it comes to where *(video cut out)*

Gabe: You were just about to tell us too what you taught.

Ismael: Yeah, nah, I was just saying I've learned so much. You know, education is a two way street. Adults and students and everybody need to be fully aware of that reality. Um, because if we aint, man, you know we're just perpetuating, continuing the same storyline, that we've been fed, and obviously that ain't working. So when you see folks starting breaking that mold, start questioning even what I'm teaching them. Start being like, "how do you know that's real, Jimenez?" I was like, right there, you're already getting to that point.

Gabe: I love that. I love that. I love that. I love that. How bout for you, um Chris, when you think about that same question. Can you share any examples, even how education plays out outside of the classroom, right? Ways that, examples of resistance and radical ideas playing out for young people.

Chris: Yeah, I got, you know, two examples. Ish knows the story of when we started the uh started the middle school Feminist Club, when I was working at, uh, the Independence School up in Germantown. So, uh, it was -

Gabe: Hold up! You said, middle school Feminist Club?

Chris: Yes!

Gabe: I gotta hear more about this

Chris: So uh, one, recognizing that uh, schools in some ways, which are sort of like based upon who's right - when you have classes that are built about who's right and who's wrong, right? There's a certain type of attitude and certain type of behavior and habits that sort of like breeds that folks are just like, "Oh, I know the right answer!" I just want to be, like, approved and validated to be right. My English Language Arts class was built on a totally different paradigm. It was built on, what is our, like, how can we see - how can we grow in our expression with one another, right? How can we relate to one another? What's the mutuality that's in the space, right? And that created some friction, right? Because it's centered on, like, where the emotional work that you can, sort of like, glean from a text. We're reading a novel about, you know uh, a teenager falling in love. You can then, you know, come into the class and say, like, "I remember that when I was thinking about falling..." or something like that, right? And some of the other kids, more male kids, will be like, "That's not the right answer! That's just saying whatever you feel!" And I'm like, "Yes! Because learning how to express yourself, right, and articulate how you feel is a skill that we all need. Right?" And that's sort of where it, like, started. And then, then, some identified as women and some identified as gender-nonconformant. We sort of came together around this sort of, like, friction that was poppin up. And said like, "What's happening

here? Why is there some tension in our class?" And I brought some like June Jordan text together as well as some Audre Lored

Gabe: Go on...

Chris: As well as some Audre Lorde - particularly Audre Lorde's *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*. That essay, and being able to talk about that essay with middle schoolers awakened a whole, sort of, like, movement! Where they understood, that like, me speaking from my space of truth, a lot of people - sometimes people can't handle that. But I don't have to worry about them not handling that. I know it's important for me to get it out. And that's how we built this sort of like, Feminist Club. And, uh, the funny story was like, one of the teachers was like, "Does it need to be called the feminist Club? Could it be called, like, you know gender equality?" I'm like - I told the students, and the students said "Nah, it's gonna be called the Feminist Club!" (*Everybody laughing*) And that was sort of, like, seeing, you know, middle school students who are interrogating patriarchy and homophobia um and also figuring out their own relationship to their gender identity. Right? It was this- It's not necessary to say that I was in it, I just was just holding space for it to happen. You know what I mean? And I think, in terms of what we do as educators, it's just that! We can't just do it - it's not something that you could do in a 9 to 5 thing, right? There's no revolutionary program that's like, I'mma teach at 8 and by 8th period I'm going back to my normal stuff. This is something that has to be 24/7 365 sort of like live it! So that when you leave these spaces, you're being met with folks in community and doing different projects, and that feeds its way back into the classroom, and how you teach. So, I always say, that like, teachers teach, the curriculum doesn't teach, teachers teach. So you give me anything, and I'm gonna bring my lens of how we get our people free, to it! And that could be anything. You know what I mean? So, always, I'm always a librarian, so I got a ton of stuff. *Lessons in Liberation: An Abolitionist Toolkit for Educators* - just came out last year. I encourage everybody to get it. But like that becomes what the work is, right? About how do we grow communities of resistance um that may begin in the classrooms, but really go out into the world. You know?

Gabe: I love that. I love that, man, I love that It ties in so beautifully. I was in a conversation last week about June Jordan and Anna Julia Cooper. Two individuals who I think need more study, more research, gotta be lifted up more, more, more. Please study June Jordan, and AJ Cooper for real. Um, I wanted to get back to Imeerah and Mel, um. Thank you for joining us and you both look so great by the way, with those Free Ant t-shirts. Shout out to our team, with the Free Ant drip. You know what I mean? You already know. Um, one thing I'm thinking about, as I kind of hear, Ish and Chris talking with such passion, um, and thinking about your own journey's through Youthbuild, even as young people. You know, What was, like the spark that for you said, you know what, this is what helped me out. Was it a person that said something? Uh, was it an experience that you had? Um...was it somebody in your family? Was it a best friend? Was it a teacher? Like, what was like the spark for you that said, you know what, this is actually gonna be my path, this will be my, my road ahead for me? What was that kind of spark moment for you? Any of y'all can jump in on that.

Imeerah: That spark period was my Mom. I was kind of, like, not into school a lot. She used to always ask me like, because I moved out of the house, she asked me, “Did you graduate? Did you graduate, yet? When you gonna graduate?” And I was, just like, tired of hearing it. I was like, aw, I gotta make her proud. I gotta let her see that. But, unfortunately, she had passed away before my graduation. So that was like - when she passed away - I was like, oh yeah I definitely got to do this for her. I gotta work hard for her. Everything about to the end - at this end point it’s all about her. So that was really my spark point.

Gabe: I love that. How bout for you, Mel?

Mel: Um, for me, it was definitely my daughter. Before her, I just, I had absolutely no motivation to do anything. But once she was born, it changed my whole outlook on everything and she just kind of like, gave me a reason, like, I’ve always thought education was important and I would, like, show her that example.

Gabe: Mm. So, I’m gonna stay with y’all. This next question, and I’m sure you know Chris and Ish, as teachers in the classroom, and also who work with young people. What keeps you? So, we know the spark. We know that moment. So what are your supports that nurture your journey through the process, right? Like, is it a group of people? Is it continuing to pursue your passions? Or your purpose? Is it, you know, trying to figure out your next step? Having your goals set out? Do you have a vision board? I don’t know. You know what I mean? What is the thing that keeps you? Because I think, oftentimes, we talk a lot about the spark piece and how you got there, but we don’t talk enough about how you got through. Right? So what has been most important for you to get through? And I’m sure that Mr. Ant, I’m sure, was one of them. What else?

Imeerah: Um, well, for me it’s like me cooking. When I do the catering business, when I do catering events, just seeing them smile and like enjoying my service and me just giving them that moment at their event. That really gives me that hype. Like, oh yeah, they like my work. They like my service. They like what I do. Cooking - I’ve been cooking since I was 5 years old so, once I see those smiles, I see people happy, they enjoy my food, yeah, that’s what gets me hype.

Gabe: How bout for you, Mel?

Mel: Um, for me, I guess like one of my main supports, I’m definitely still very connected with YouthBuild, cause I don’t have a lot of family support, so it’s nice to have people that I can like talk to, and go to for advice. And um also, like I said my daughter. I’ve experienced a lot of things, but she makes me want to do it for the right reason, makes me want to do more of that.

Gabe: I gotta ask you Imeerah...what’s your dish?

Imeerah: I’m very good with pasta.. Different types of pasta. Alfredo. Also, sometimes I make my own homemade pasta.

Gabe: You're speaking my language! We might need to have a Free Ant something and you do the catering. We'll cover the cost of the ingredients. Ish, as folks who like to impact students in a positive way in the classroom, what's going through your head when you hear Imeerah and Mel talking about these things?

Ismael: The real education doesn't even usually happen in the school building. It happens in the real world. It speaks to even the affirmation that you're doing right. You're doing what you like to do. Education has been perverted in such a way that folks associate doing well in school with being intelligent, with being smart. I don't need your measurements to tell me I'm smart, that I'm capable. All those types of things are what I define them to be. You know, that's the difference! And I think, knowing brother Ant, man, I know that's his whole vibe, right? No matter where you at, man, like, nobody is in a position to judge anybody. For real! Like, this is - nobody has an answer, nobody has a solution, like, we muddling through this jawn together. And so while we're muddling through this jawn together, we gotta be honest about that. Gotta be honest about our own experiences. We have to be patient with one another. We have to be honest with the folks around us. Not trying to put an image that says I'm better than you because I got this or I got that. And unfortunately, that is what is reinforced a lot within our society. Right? And so, when you break away from that, when you step away and then step forward and be like, I need to do this. I need to define myself. That affirmation is gonna come because I placed that value on it. Not because this value is imposed upon me. Um, a lot of times, you know, I graduated high school with a 1.6 GPA, man. I hated school! But I loved education. And see that's the difference, man. And so once we approach our students like that, once we approach each other like that, even adults, cause we got 50-60 year olds that needed to go back to the drawing board on some stuff. And even though they think they got the answer, they don't. And it's like the onion layers, right? The deeper you get, you ain't going in circles, bruh, you're going in a spiral! And that spiral takes you to a deeper understanding of your purpose. And that purpose is much more meaningful than someone else telling you what is meaningful.

Gabe: Awesome. And before we get to Chris, though, I actually want you, Ish, to unpack that a bit more, cause I don't want us to gloss over what you just said cause it's very powerful. And I think it gets to, perhaps, some of what Mel and Imeerah, sort of alluded to earlier. You said, you weren't for school, you were for education. Unpack that a bit more for us so we could understand what you mean when you break that down for us.

Ismael: So, you know, um, I was blessed enough to be exposed to the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* when I was in like 4th grade after a racist incident in a white school in Montgomery County. And then, from being exposed to that book in 4th grade, man, I loved to read! I loved to debate people, man. Folks was calling my Ismael X in 5th grade! Man, I was wearing the hat before the movie came out. (Gabe laughing).

Gabe: Ismael X!

Ismael: Ismael X. My Mom even bought me the old school name jawn that said Ismael X on it. But like, straight, like, I just loved to, like, think about things, debate things, and I recognized that that wasn't being given to me in school. I realized that most of them folks who were teaching me didn't know anything. And that were just trying to replicate what already existed. And so, I peeped that game before I knew how to peep that game. So as a result, like I rebelled, man, like in a negative way. You know what I mean? I won't get into the details because we on Instagram Live, but, you know, I could have easily went in a wrong direction and been thrown away!

Gabe: I understand.

Ismael: Even though, I loved education! And see, the whole thing was, I loved to engage folks with deeper conversations about, you know, the meaning of our existence, about what it means to even be who we think we are. Like I was in that game from a young age. So much so that all my friends would be like, "Aw Ismael" I became what was known as what I call a tolerable deviant. "Aw that's just Ismael talking over there." And the thing was, it's like, nah bruh, you don't realize I was plugged into something, something deep before I even knew it was deep. And so, that's why it's so important that children, at a young age, are exploring these issues, right? There's no coincidence that, if you look at the Doll test, them kids 4 or 5 years old, can tell you the white doll is pretty and the Black doll is ugly and they can't even write their name. Because we were being taught, we were being indoctrinated before we even recognized it. And I was just lucky enough to be exposed to something so young and my Mom who was a super supportive of helping me muddle through that book in 4th grade. Man, reading Malcolm X in 4th grade is no joke. But that piece always was something I could refer back to as I was getting confused.

Gabe: Right right. I love that.

Ismael: And, that's why I love education, but school is trash.

Gabe: Yeah, you know what's funny, man, you know Chris, I've heard you speak often about your journeys through the Chester School District, um, and obviously you've also worked here in Philadelphia. Talk a bit about those experiences if you can. Share as much as you can share as far as your, I guess, vulnerabilities and what you saw as a Black student, sort of trying to interface and engage with the schools and what that early on meant for you on your journey to where you are now.

Chris: Yeah, I mean, for me it was, um, finding that sense of purpose in education was something I don't think I really figured out until my 20s. Though, my Mom was a school teacher in the Chester-Upland school district. Right? So, growing up my siblings and I, Chester-Upland has been persistently troubled, but mostly because of the way we fund education in this society. And then it was also under state control, which meant that they could just experiment with any sort of like, structure, that they wanted to do with the school district, any time they wanted to. Right? And, so my experience through school is recognizing the systemic issues while also

being...um, incubated in a culture where, Chester-Upland for a long time, I don't know if it's still right now, has the highest percentage of teachers of color in the state of Pennsylvania.

Gabe: Mmm...I didn't know that!

Chris: And a lot of that is an effect of, you got Cheyney University, Cheyney State, you got Lincoln University. That's not too far. It was the Black educators who even in the midst of the structural injustice and oppression found ways to, like, love Black children, teach them the truth, and find them opportunities to sort of like, push them through. And I still have my, like, little issues, little resistances, and because I was thinking about the conversation we were having, and it reminded me of this poem from Lucille Clifton. It's really short. I love it. It's called, *why some people be mad at me sometimes*, and it goes,

“they asked me to remember
but they want me to remember
their memories
and I keep on remembering
mine”

That's it. And that was exactly...

Gabe: Let that breathe. Let that breathe for a second.

Chris: (laughing) I'll say it again. “they asked me to remember but they want me to remember their memories and I keep on remembering mine.” I think, when we think about, like, the lineage of Black struggle, not just in the United States, but globally, right? It's about, like, whose lineage are remembering? Whose lineage are we uplifting? Whose genealogy, right? And I know Dr. Greg Carr, and others, Philadelphia Freedom Schools, they have this whole thing, right, that we as Black people have our own standard of what excellence is, right? And we got to uphold what that means, right? Uh, Walter Rodney in *Grounding with My Brothers* talks about African history in service of revolution. Right? And so that's where we must be. So that idea of remembering was always huge to me! And I think, you know, I got another one called (holds up book) *Fugitive Pedagogy*, Carter G Woodson, *The Art of Black Teaching* And what he talks about, something like a fugitive moment that's happening to schools and speaks to Ismael's point about schooling versus education. There's this teacher, right? And she's from the early 1900s and she's supposed to be teaching the “standard curriculum”, right, or whatever. But she's actually teaching David Walkers' *Appeal* right? But every time the Principal comes through the halls, she has a monitor and is like, “He's comin!” and she would switch the book and go back to the standard curriculum. (Gabe laughing) And I don't know, Ish, you know what I mean? That kind of feels like, we kind of exist in that space, right? But, what's the important thing there, it's about recognizing that we have a different conception of what it means to really just be human, to be in this world. We have a responsibility to do that. We're obligated to our ancestors to continue in that lane. So, yeah there's some systemic things. I might lose my job, but we gon' do what we

have to do to get our communities where we need to be. As my Mom would say. "We gotta love on our children." You know what I mean?

Gabe: That's right.

Chris: So it was that, right? And I'll give you a bonus one, say like (holds up book) *Spirit of Our Work* from Cynthia Dillard about the role of Black women teachers. Just like my Mom, but so many others. This is another one that helps us remind ourselves of what we need to remember in this moment.

Gabe: Awesome. Awesome. Who's the author, again, you said?

Chris: Cynthia Dillard.

Gabe: Yeah, I think that one I'm not familiar. I'm familiar with your other books, Chris! You always bring one out the woodworks.

Chris: Fun fact: Andre Dillard on the Eagles - that's her nephew

Gabe: Oh! Got you. Got you. Dope. I'mma bring out some books that I got here in a minute, that I'm in the middle of. I'm kind of half way through. But back to Imeerah and Mel, as you're hearing Chris and Ish, and the passion about the movement and the struggle, um, how do we figure out ourselves better as a people. Obviously, we find ourselves in the midst of Black History Month, um, what have you learned, that's been - that's sort of, I guess, struck you as important as you think about the movement for freedom to combat issues like racism, all the hatred that we find ourselves dealing with, a lot of the issues that are systemic, maybe even institutional, right, structural? What have you seen, or what have you heard, or what have you internalized that have helped you to better understand the world? Like is there anything specific that you've learned that you could share with us today?

Mel: Oh, so me, obviously, like, I'm white, um, so there have been a lot of things that I was specifically taught growing up that I've had to unlearn. Biases that I had to break down. I really did it just by like learning. I started to, like, notice that some things just didn't make sense, that there's so many events in history that we just weren't taught. Like the Black Wall Street bombing, the MOVE 9 bombing. The MOVE 9 especially, like, being raised in Philadelphia and never hearing about something that big that happened, it really just opened my eyes to, like, continue learning and continue unlearning at the same time. Also just like try to talk to other white people, try to educate them, so the load isn't always on you guys to have to tell them what to do. So I try to, like, uh, with Reclaim Philadelphia, they have, like, an anti-racism, like this white thing, like white leaders trying to, like, educate other white people and I think that's really inspiring.

Gabe: I love that. Unlearning - taking up space with other folks, to figure out ways to combat, and pursue allyship in a real way, that's tangible, right? How about for you Imeerah? Is there anything that kind of comes to mind for you?

Imeerah: Um, so I was born in Philly, but I moved to South Carolina like in first grade. And there were a lot of, like, white teachers. So when I came here it was, like, very, very different. In South Carolina, they teach you, but they don't teach you.

Gabe: Listen, listen, listen.

Imeerah: They put it in front of you and just go. Soon as I got to Philly the teachers will welcome me, they will text you, wake you up. They will motivate you to do what you really want to do. And I noticed that, that difference, that some care more than others, you know?

Gabe: I love that. Sticking with you both also, because I love to hear this, particularly as we move forward, because, um, when Ant is victorious, and Ant's gonna be victorious, right? We all know that on this call. Um, obviously Ant is somebody that's concerned with many issues, as we all are, education is certainly one of them. Is there any particular issues, I know, I heard you speak about feeding folks, I heard you talk about folks who are homeless, or houseless, is there any particular issue that you could perhaps see yourself saying, you know what, I may not have ever been, perhaps, an organizer in the traditional sense, but, you know what, I might want to go to a meeting about this particular subject matter, you know? What might that be for you?

Imeerah: Um, one thing for me is like the homeless people, in school, like a portrait of ways you could help the homeless or like an organization who can help. And like, since living in Philly, like on K and A (*Kensington and Allegheny*), you see a lot of homeless people. People don't got houses and all that. People is not eating. So that's one thing I would love to give back to, cause cooking is my passion. I would love to give back food to those people who don't have food, or who miss a day without a meal, or who don't got clothing. And I tried around my area, because there's a lot of people around my way, and, like, on Thanksgiving I gave people at the church some food. I'm like, I got all this food and there's only two people who live at my house, like, here you go!

Gabe: (Laughing) That's right.

Imeerah: If I could give back it would be to, like, homeless people.

Gabe: Nice. And I heard you mention Reclaim, earlier, Mel. But is there anything else, specific, you know, that you kind of, want to attach yourself to?

Mel: Um...there's so many things.

Gabe: I know, yeah, yeah.

Mel: There's so many things, like, there's police brutality, there's health, there's the opioid crisis, but I think definitely, like, the mental health and the drug crisis, is definitely something that I would definitely want to work with. It kind of hits close to home, just because I struggle with my mental health and there are a lot of people in my family who are struggling with addiction. And I think it's like a really big problem in our city right now.

Gabe: Yeah, thank you for sharing that. I literally just returned, I mean, mental health and behavioral health is my field of work, so we could definitely talk offline. I literally was doing a project with some young people around mental health, literally right before we got on Live with this here today, so, if you ever want to check in about mental health, behavioral health, let's definitely do that offline, for sure. And I'll make sure that we connect through Jas and shout out to Sarah as well! Shout out to Sarah, I'm not sure if you know her as Ms. Sarah, I'm not sure how y'all talk to Ms. Sarah (laughing), but shout out to Sarah also as the plug for us with the Committee over at YouthBuild. As we begin to close, and thank you for everybody for still staying with us, for the past, I guess now, almost 50 minutes. I want, just, want to close out, I guess, by asking this fundamental question, man. I'll start with you, Ish. You know, we're in Black History Month, which is obviously, you know, critical for us as a people, but also as a nation, as a world, you know. How have you, I guess, thought about Black History Month in the context of education, for you, right? We have some folks who say, you know, Black history is all year round. Um, but is there anything different that you've approached, this month, in the classroom for you?

Ismael: Well, yeah! If you read the original intention of Negro History Week when Carter G. Woodson started it in 1926, was to use the week just to celebrate and to, uh, talk about, kind of, what was learned all year round. You know, Carter G Woodson recognized the danger of accepting and thinking in a way that was Eurocentric. And he even called that out! That's why, when you talk about Black History Month, now, Carter G. Woodson ain't even really around. Because he goes against, kind of, the narrative of racial progress, number one. Because if you read *The Miseducation of the Negro* written in 1931, it applies today, man. Like all the things that he talks about, it still exists within the classroom. The lynching of the Black child from the very beginning. I think that also, the way to approach it is to recognize that this story is the human story. That this story of resistance that Black people in this society have developed is transferable towards resistance for everyone. That it gives life and purpose beyond, this really, quite frankly, empty civilization, Western civilization, that has developed. Where material accumulation, and what you own and who you are, obviously has not given us what you actually need. So when we look at our society today we see these issues, like the opioid crisis, and mental health issues, on levels never even seen and we're not even talking about the environment. We're not talking about the effect on people's diets and health and everything, man! Like it is sick right now.

Gabe: Teach!

Ismael: And, I approach Black history as in a way where folks can start decoupling themselves from this, and start to teach children, well if this aint good, what's the alternative? Who can we

look to in the past that called for the same thing, man? So like, when you look at what Martin King was saying in 1968 before the government shot him...he was talking about the same situation that exists now! The same situation that created the uprisings after George Floyd was the same situation that existed while Malcolm was alive. And he even pointed that out! So you just see this continuity of this intellectual genealogy within the American society, by Black folks, that just basically, like, always articulated, like this is sick, man! We have to develop something that's an alternative, so that's how I approach Black History Month. Black History Month is just a point where, hey, give me a space to elevate this narrative even further and I'm gonna run with it. But don't forget that I'm working on this jawn all year round! And so when that month comes around, I already got them plans laid out and the ideas fully formulated, and I think that's when we start to realize that it's more than a mere procession of illustrious individuals, like what it's become. Like, I don't care about the dude who made the Supersoaker! He also developed the stealth bomber! See these are the conversations...you know Ruby Bridges is always pointed out, but that girl went through so much trauma, integrating a school, that if you look at the school that she integrated now, was taken over by the state in New Orleans, eventually charter-ized, and is mostly African-American. See that changes up the whole story! So when we're prepared to actually, really, truly, be intellectually honest about what the situation we're facing, about what Black history actually means, this month is just a point where we just celebrate and to point out to other folks, "oh you're just celebrating during this month? Let me hit you with the truth."

Gabe: I love it. I love it. I love it. How about for you Imeerah and Mel. What has Black History month meant for y'all? This year, or just years past? Particularly as you think about what you've also learned over the years that may have impacted this month differently for you.

Mel: Um, so, in my experience, um, I don't - back when I was in elementary school and middle school, I don't remember too much Black History celebration incorporated into the curriculum. So I guess YouthBuild was my first experience where they actually, like, sat us down and taught us the truth. Honestly, it changed my outlook on everything. It changed my view of the world, and my view of the people in charge. It really broke down a lot for me and it helped me become a better person.

Imeerah: Yes, like, I - it helped me like - Black History Month - it helped me have a different outlook on the world, and boost success on Black History Month, and stuff. It just means so much to me and like, 'Who cares?' There's so much that we don't know, and, in elementary school and middle school, we SHOULD have been learning that, but we don't remember none of that stuff, it wasn't taught to us. And so we DO go to a school that actually cares!

Ant Smith: (from the comments) Incredibly proud and honored to have taught Meerah and Mel. We are in the presence of some of the dopest young people on the planet. That's not hyperbolic! I got the GOAT community ya hear me! (*Shouting emojis*)

Gabe: I love that. And shout out to Ant, who's in the comments right now. Much love to you, Ant! You know what I mean? For sure. We out here for you. And his comment is definitely, uh,

moving me as I read it. So, he's showing love to y'all Imeerah and Mel if you can't read it. I'm sure you'll be able to see it in a minute once we close. But, um, as we do close, Chris, sort of on a lighter note, again because we're in the spirit of our brother Ant Smith, one thing that we all know whether it's Ish, whether it's Chris, whether it's Imeerah, whether it's Mel, we all know not only is Ant about the people, he's also about the people, and the music! So, so, when you think about music right now, who's an artist or an album, right now, that you listen to, right now, to get through those low moments or high moments. Because we also know that one thing that's key about Ant is that he loves his music, alright. So maybe we'll start with you Chris. What music are you listening to right now, maybe that we all might wanna tap in with?

Chris: I had a whole bunch of stories, man, but ahhh it's alright.

Gabe: No no no! If you wanna go to your story first, and then do the music, we could do that. Cause we bout to close anyways. So it's cool.

Chris: I'm gonna do some quick plugs and I'mma get to the music. Quick plug, I wanna say, you know, Carter G. Woodson, the legacy of Carter G. Woodson is also apparent right here in Philadelphia. Carter G. Woodson worked with Judge Raymond Pace Alexander in the early 20s, um, they began an ASALH (*Association for the Study of African American Life and History*) chapter right here in Philadelphia in 1929. Uh, Carter G. Woodson teaches at M Street High School in the early 1900s. M Street High School becomes Dunbar High School. Guess who attends Dunbar High School, or M Street High School? Sadie Tanner Mosell Alexander, who, you know, eventually Penn, she goes to Penn, they rename the school after her, in West Philadelphia. We could talk about that story too, but Sadia Tanner Mossell Alexander and Raymond Pace Alexander - they're married. They lead the leading civil rights law firm here in Philadelphia. And of course, in the later times, the 50s and 60s, they go visit, Raymond Pace Alexander is considered, like, the most, one of the most popular mentees of Carter G. Woodson, but Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander is also cousins with Paul Robeson, right? So, we have this house that's on 50th and Walnut, you know where Paul Robeson lived. We're currently working on the Henry O'Tanner house, which is at 29th and Diamond Street, 2908 Diamond St.

Gabe: North Philly

Chris: This is the house in which Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander was born and Carter G. Woodson calls this house on 29th and Diamond the center of Black intellectual life in Philadelphia. It's just to say, like, Black history is also always around us.

Gabe: No doubt.

Chris: Now, about this music. I love Saba's album, Saba's new album. I do think that Black Thought has the best verse on that album, and feel bad for Saba in that way. But you know Black Thought's Black Thought, so you can't really, you know, top that. Um, another one of my favorite artists right now is Navy Blue and you always gotta show love, to uh, one Tierra Whack! 2. Ivy Sole, Ivy Sole who has a deep connection to Philadelphia. Her album *Candid* I highly,

highly recommend it, and this track, the one particular track, it's the final track called *Otherside*. So Ivy Sole, Tierra Whack, Saba, um, and my man Kur just outta Philly. You know what I mean? So I gotta represent for Kur.

Gabe: Yeah. No doubt. I'mma go to y'all Mel and Imeerah. What y'all listening to right now? What kind of music you think Ant would be, you know, making fun of y'all about? Or either probably wanting to play if he was walking in the hall right now?

Imeerah: One song that really used to motivate me was, Andra Day - Rise up, like that's like deep. Or I listen to Adele, I love me some Adele - Take It Easy On Me, all that stuff. I do love my Cardi B and stuff. You know I got my Cardi B, my 2 Chainz. They on the side, but, um, that being the two people. I really like Adele.

Gabe: I love it. I love it. How bout for you, Mel?

Mel: For me, I've been really into Daniel Caesar right now. He's like a newer RnB artist. I'm really behind on music.

Gabe: It's all good. If you say Daniel Caesar then you're not behind! Yeah, Ant said, "Kur!!!" Ain't no doubt. You bout for you, Ish? Who else? Who else you got?

Ismael: Killa Priest came out with like 5 albums the last two years, so I've been banging that heavy. Wise Intelligent's new stuff, I'm real hype on that. I still bang Dead Prez's like 7 albums, like it just came out. So you know me? I'm always on that conscious, heavy tip. But yeah, man, it's all love.

Chris: Gabe, you gotta go. Don't think you was just a moderator. You got to answer some stuff, bro.

Gabe: (laughing) First I'mma say this. First, I'mma show some books, cause you showed some books, super fast, that I'm reading. One is shout out to Tarana Burke - I'm finally reading *Unbound*. I finally got to it. So finally jumping into Tarana Burke's book, *Unbound*. Finally jumping into Colin Kaepernick's book on Abolition, Colin Kaepernick has a really dope anthology book, that is super dope that I'm just tapping in with.

Chris: He's with Mumia Abu Jamal.

Gabe: Yes he is. And thirdly, because I got to read more novels, 'cause I read so much nonfiction, Kiese Laymon's book *Long Division*. Um, cause I gotta read more novels, I gotta read more fiction, cause I'm so overwhelmed with nonfiction. I'm tryna, like, make my imagination better, and I feel like fiction helps me do that. Musically, before I go though, I just wanna say, I gotta say shout out to Ant, man, cause if you know Ant's IG and he'll be like walking down on his walks and he'll have, like, music. He'll have everything from Wu Tang to Durk and so I just appreciate you, Ant, for always giving me just vibes, with your IG walks. But I

think for me, I'm gonna say, a lot of soul music and house and afrobeat - Osunlade, a lot of Osunlade, if you know him. O-S-U-N-L-A-D-E. A lot of WizKid vibes, a lot of WizKid, um, and lately, like today for instance, because of the Versuz from last week, I played a lot of old Musiq Soulchild stuff, just because I was in nostalgia from the Versuz. So, thank y'all for tapping in! Thank you Chris. Thank you Ish. Thank you Imeerah. Thank you Mel. Thank you to say thank you to everybody behind the scenes with Imeerah and Mel, making sure everything worked out. I want to say thank you, again to the entire Free Ant Defense Committee for doing phenomenal work. You can see us at freeantphl.com also @freeantphl obviously here on IG, and FreeAntPhl on Facebook. Get in contact with us if you want to help volunteer, also please note, we'll be back out in the street as it gets warmer. We still have merchandise for you all. We still have t-shirts, more t-shirts, that Imeerah and Mel are wonderfully modeling for y'all tonight. If you haven't gotten your t-shirt yet, we can still get one soon. Just hit us up! We can get one to you. And, uh, again man, just, you know, #FreeAnt, like I said before, you know, the case will be probably in June, and so we're gonna plan for that. And let's put some #FreeAnt's in the comments and we'll see you next month. Take care, have a good month. Peace!

Ismael: Peace, peace y'all!