

[Music fades in and out]

Michelle McKinley: Welcome to Kitchen Table, a podcast featuring the voices and meditations of feminists. As we think about a black feminist ethic in the time of Covid 19. Today's guest is Professor Maria Miller Young, who teaches in the Department of Feminist Studies at UC Santa Barbara. Professor Miller Young teaches and researches about race, gender, and sexuality in U.S. history, popular film, and culture, popular culture, and the sex industry.

Her book, *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*, published by Duke, has won multiple prizes from the ASA and the NWSA. Doctor Miller Young has also published in numerous anthologies, academic journals, and news outlets, including *Porn Archives*, *Queer Sex Work*, *New Views on Pornography*, *Sexualities*, *Meridians*, *The New York Times*, *Colorlines*, *The Post*, *Coming Out Like a Porn Star*, and *Spread*, a sex worker magazine.

All of this is incredibly important, but I think this is an incredibly important feature on Kitchen Table.

Shoniqua Roach: It is. Excited to have you here, Mireille.

Mireille Miller-Young: Thank you!

Shoniqua Roach: Kick us off with the first question and hopefully we can hear you at some point. Michelle, you can pop in. So, given the pandemic that has devastated many Black, Indigenous and Latinx communities, coupled with the onslaught of state sponsored violence against Black folk, how do we define a Black feminist care ethic in this moment? What does this mean for activists and institutional based formations as we navigate the Academy? What forms of praxis can we develop as some of us settle into disembodied teaching format?

Mireille Miller-Young: It reminds me of the work of the *Under Commons*, that Fred Martin and Stephen Harvey are doing that and then provoking us to really think about ourselves in terms of what we can use the university to, to provide the resources that we need and that we take those we take it away. We steal it, we rob them.

Michelle McKinley: But yeah, he has that beautiful, sentiment of being in it, but not of it.

Shoniqua Roach: Right. Right.

Mireille Miller-Young: And I feel like that's very healthy right. Now to, not be of the madness and not be of this, this kind of, this, corporate model in a way. And the and also a model that is so inflexible that it can't really catch up to the moment and it can't really also take account of, "okay, how does this work into our promotions"? How does this work into

the ways in which we are evaluated? Are you still saying it's just a book to tenure and to books to full?

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Michelle McKinley: I love that sentiment. So, using the university as the conduit through which to obtain the things you need. But we're, we're being asked to do a lot more right now with a whole lot less, you know? So.

Shoniqua Roach: Right.

Michelle McKinley: Like we have to suddenly become super proficient online teachers when few of us have any of that kind of training.

Like, what will it look like to, I don't, like, transition. I'm thinking Black feminist studies courses in particular to an online format. Given what you said, Mireille, about living context, I'm wondering about Black, queer and trans students who might not have safe spaces in which to even discuss course content, whether asynchronous or not. You know what I mean?

Mireille Miller-Young: Yes. And I that's why I'm thinking more and more about just writing assignments, because perhaps they can write safely where they may not be able to speak safely at home. That through setting up a kind of conversations and group chats and things like this in their discussion sections. You know, and I'm also going to be very flexible with my office hours and invite people to, tell me a time that in a way that they can call me on FaceTime if they need you or things like that, where if they can potentially step out of their situation, to, to, to inform me what's going on.

But I, I just, I feel like we have to be, in this balancing act between connecting and disconnecting. For our own wellbeing and health. Because we can't be overly available and online all the time because we have families and we have things that we need to do and, and, and this, ultimately, if we add up the amount of hours that are going into prep and, and carrying all this through, it's going to be doubling our work.

And we just can't allow that because they're definitely not doubling our salaries.

Shoniqua Roach: That's beautiful. I think that's a good segue into the next question. So is our Feminist Center, CSWS is advocating for child care relief and an institutional recognition of care work. As Black feminist we are aware of the potential co-optation of the biological heteronormative family that threatens to engulf non-heteronormative family formations. Some of us are queer, some of us are parents, some of us are queer parents.

We mother the children of others. We care for family and relatives across the generations. Often, we are the only successful ones who made it in our families. We have responsibilities and obligations that should be factored into any feminist strategies of care work. How do we take this opportunity to articulate care work based on a Black feminist ethic?

Mireille Miller-Young: I love that question, Shoniqua. That that is exactly it.

You know, we are in this moment of, of; speaking of care work. I hope that you can't hear my baby's crying in the other room.

Shoniqua Roach: No, it's perfectly fine. It's *Kitchen Table*. It's *Kitchen Table*. *Safe Kitchen Table*. There you go.

Michelle McKinley: And if we did, they would not be edited out.

Mireille Miller-Young: Okay. Thank you. Well, you know, he, he might come over here and climb all over me to help.

Shoniqua Roach: That's fine too.

Mireille Miller-Young: You know, it is it is that juggle, and I, you know, actually going mad because you know, we have a family where we're both professionals. But somehow in all of this, I have defaulted to being the one with the kids 15 hours a day. I've defaulted to be the one who cleans the kitchen and cooks the food. My partners defaulted to going shopping.

Shoniqua Roach: Which doesn't seem equal. You know?

Mireille Miller-Young: Yes. They're risking their life to to go in the store, but I'm like, you know, that takes like an hour.

Shoniqua Roach: I was going to say, well, if you include the sanitization of groceries.

Mireille Miller-Young: Right. Yeah, exactly.

And I'm the one who is cleaning them and organizing the groceries and, you know, and taking care of everything. And, of course, the emotional burden of my children who are scared to death about, you know, "why can't we see our friends and why can't we go play? And why can't we go to the playground? And why can't we travel?"

Shoniqua Roach: My nine year old said recently, "I can't believe I'm only nine years old and already there's a *death virus* going around!"

Michelle McKinley: Yes. Emotional and intellectual labor. Yeah. Yeah.

Mireille Miller-Young: So I, I it is really hard for them and I think that, my older son is having a lot of issues around, toileting. There's a lot of peeing in the bed from being frightened. So that means I'm doing extra laundry and washing all the sheeting, bedding every day. And I'm very tired.

You know, this on top of the time where I was supposed to be writing my second monograph, preparing to go up to full and, it just feels impossible. And so what I do is I think about my mother because I feel like I learned everything about Black feminist care from her before I ever read a book about it.

And, and, and she passed a few years ago. And so when I do, it's very painful. But it's also like a way that I can connect with her. And, it reminds me of her. I just have these, these memories of her struggling and striving, but also kind of talking to herself as she clean. She'd be praying. She'd be talking to her mother who passed, talking to ancestors, making kind of divine space in the house. Bringing in the healthy food to nourish our bodies. Doing art with me when we needed to escape, or taking me to a museum or something to get my head out of things. But she gathered me up and stole me away when she needed to, out of danger.

And I think about her. I think about Harriet Tubman, who, look at that model of Black feminist care and family work. All of the ages and genders that she rescued and that kind of thing of "wade in the water". You know, I think there's a lot of there's a lot of truth in our own stories about how to handle these moments.

These are not, these are unique in some ways. But, you know, our overriding experience is not unique in in terms of our struggle. If we look at how folks were, were coping during the Civil Rights Movement, absolutely. The violence against children in the streets. And so, you know, I think that not only is it been the virus, but it's been watching the uprisings, the protests and the handling of that and the violence against people and the police and the, and the response by, you know, the Yeti in chief.

And so I just kind of, have been meditating on this being part of, like, the epic arc of our struggle and how important Black women have been to that in every way. And they're always doing mothering. They're always doing care work. And that is part of the ethic that I think that, you know, you and I, Michelle, like that we're all trying to bring to our Black feminist work is to infuse it with that sense of history and lineage and purpose and but also that we should use that as a kind of resource that fills us up like a cup.

Right? Like.

But not sometimes, you know, you could beat yourself up and be like, "I'm not as strong as Fannie Lou Hamer", or "I'm not as strong as my grandmother in what she went through. I

can't believe that.” But you know, this in this moment, I think they'd say, “wow, you're stronger in so many ways and you don't know it.”

Like if we if we could just pick up the phone, to, to spirit, to ancestors, to our moms, they would say, “Honey, don't compare yourself. You got a new reality, you know? But you have the tools and we're with you. We'll never leave you and”

Shoniqua Roach: “We prepare you for this.” We've prepared you for this, right?

Michelle McKinley: I saw recently on Twitter, *Black Feminist* on Twitter said something about social distancing and how social distancing is not unique, but rather endemic to the Black experience. So it's really proffered an opportunity to really sit in the home space. And I love what you said about your mom conjuring a divine home space. Right. So sit in the home space and do our work, the work we've been doing from that site. Right?

Mireille Miller-Young: Absolutely. We always talked about home as a sanctuary. And so and I think that's partly why I don't mind being at home and why I didn't mind having all my events canceled in the spring, because I really just, the part of me just wanted to introvert and and, and hide and and cook some beans in a pot and, you know, bring people in.

Michelle McKinley: That's self-care, that's self-care, you know. We really, this was one of the, the inspirations for coming to the kitchen table as well as to honor the press. But this is where knowledge and, and, and, and a sense of purpose and safety and sanctuary. You know, Shoniqua just wrote a really beautiful, meditation that she shared with me.

And it's also about how for Black women, that space was denied to us for so long, so that homemaking, domesticity in the people that we choose to share this with is, is not just self-care. It's sacred.

Mireille Miller-Young: It's homemaking.

Michelle McKinley: It's a reclaiming.

Mireille Miller-Young: Right? Right. It's a reclaiming.

Michelle McKinley: Reclaiming. You know, Marlo David in her interview had this beautiful thing where she said that she got cuttings from a rosebush that was planted by her grandmother, and she just got a tiny little cutting, and she's trying to plant it in her new place where she's living now. And I just think, you know, I mean, probably one of the first books that I ever picked up as a, you know, baby freshman in Wellesley College was *In Search of Our Mother's Garden*.

Shoniqua Roach: Oh, wow.

Michelle McKinley: And it just completely illuminated my life because my mother was an inveterate gardener. I mean, my mother was like one of those ladies that would like go to somebody's house and, you know, tell me to make a distraction so she could steal a plant and a cuttings from, like, her neighbor and things like that. So I really I never saw this as an art form and I, yeah, I, I now look very, very closely at people's gardens because my...

Mireille Miller-Young: Mother used to find, like, plants that people would throw out in the trash. We grew up, I grew up in New York City in a very tiny one-bedroom apartment on the 15th floor at the Lower East Side. So, we didn't even have a terrace, but we had an East facing window, and every plant that she rescued would love that light. And when I was growing up, the plants were just covering the window and growing all the way up to the ceiling because everything that she touched were just flower. And I mean, I've always had a Black thumb and lately I've been trying to take up. I just started with a pot of, like, herbs and peppers and tomatoes, and it's not even, you know, it's not like she gardened, like growing food, but it was just the she, she had that element and, and and I feel that when I connect to the earth, when I connect to the plants, I feel very grounded and connected to ancestors. And, and I will tell you too, that the other practice that I've been doing, and that comes from us of growing up around Puerto Rican and Dominicans and a lot of Caribbean people, in New York City, is that I built an altar.

And since she died, I, I started that practice. And it's been growing and growing to include other relatives and folks in the family. And I've moved three times this year because I moved to Harvard, and now I'm in the Midwest. We always bring the altar and we set that up. And my kids, we have the practice now of when they when they find something cool, like they find a feather from a goose outside or a cool stone, or shall I say, oh, that's beautiful, "Why don't you go put it on the altar for Bubby?" That's their name for my mother. And, and and they're like. "Okay, I could put it on the altar, you know? And so I my son the other day, he was stealing a bunch of stuff from all over the house. I said, "What are you doing?" He's like, I'm making my own altar."

But it's kind of like a treasure, you know, trove. But it gives us a locus of, of, setting our intention and honoring. And I just feel that it's whatever ritual people can do to feel connected and feel like they're making their home and sanctuary safe. Will, will be helpful. In the in this time. And just like feeding our bodies, we need we need vitamins. Really minerals. We need urge. We need whole foods. Stay away from the factory farming where all this disease is outbreaking. And, you know, just, just really nurture ourselves, so that that's something that I'm reminded of when I think of how I was raised.

You know, my mother, around the same time, she didn't take care of herself, and she smoked cigarettes for 50 years, and she, didn't really exercise. If she did, she was smoking a cigarette, walking to, getting something to eat. She considered walking to the, the deli where they had great pastrami her exercise.

But, you know that that reminds me that, you know, we also have these inherited habits of sometimes self-sabotage or poor, poor health habits that are connected because we have emotional investments around food or certain practices that aren't always healthy. Smoking is something I still struggle with, for my anxiety, even though I know that it killed my mother's lungs.

And so I feel like, you know, of course we are, always intention. We all are not angels. We can't be perfect. But I feel that, you know, just recognizing the healing aspects and being open to them and doing what we can to kind of build that, that mother's garden in our own lives.

Shoniqua Roach: And so beautiful.

Michelle McKinley: I love that this question was about institutional strategies of care work.

Mireille Miller-Young: But no no no no. This is completely appropriate when you're talking about the care work that Black feminist are doing for ourselves and our communities in the context of home space. And how necessary that is. I've been thinking a lot about Cheryl Wall. I've been thinking a lot about this question, actually. The labor it requires, a Black woman in particular and Women of Color, incessant demands on Black and Women of Color, flesh to constantly be advocating for something, pushing the institution to do something. So, you know, I love that you rooted that question to the home.

Michelle McKinley: I mean, Ray, you were saying something about like, this attachment to respectability. And this is around the refusal to think, like the continuity of sexual labor across different spheres and how, like the quarantine, like moving a lot of our labor to the home, forced labor to the home, is necessitating that we do that work. But I was having a conversation with a brilliant friend who will cite Randy Gill Sadler, and we were talking about safety, and attachments to safety, Black women's attachments to safety. Despite empirical evidence that that safety is available to almost none of us. Right. And I'm formulating a question around it, but it has me thinking about it.

Mireille Miller-Young: Wow. That's, that's fascinating. I mean, I think that there's actually a connection between, the kind of attachments to safety and yet not having. Safety, And, and no place for pleasure, as Michelle was saying. You know, I, I think that those are things that, often operate with in terms of privilege.

Shoniqua Roach: Oh, absolutely.

Mireille Miller-Young: Right. And so, you know, I feel like there's, there's certain spaces where, where we're Black people have traditionally found pleasure in ways that are sensual and embodied, are often the places that are derided by the Black middle class as being, you know, the juke joints, the sin dens, the blues clubs. Right. You know, the places that we're trying to excavate for all of this richness and in theory and culture and experience and Black life now, you know, but are often the sites of...

Shoniqua Roach: Intense classification for sure.

Mireille Miller-Young: Exactly. And policing is just the disciplining. Right. And, you know, and also this kind of question of who has the right to pleasure and, you know, when, when can we have pleasure and what kinds of pleasure can, women have? Are they supposed to just take pleasure out of the doing for others? Just take pleasure in our gardens.

Right. And, and, and growing the home? Or can we have those public and those, those, those, those dirty and deviant pleasures too? You know, and they've kind of province of men in a way.

Michelle McKinley: So I'm just thinking yeah. Go ahead. I'm just thinking, Shoniqua and I, we're talking about just *Wayward Lives*, you know, just that beautiful meditation on these spaces and bringing those spaces to life.

Mireille Miller-Young: Yes. And I think that the work of excavating, and really thinking about how do we, bring, you know, this kind of archive of, this, this broken, fractured, lost, hidden archive of the, the, the deviant folks, the kind of the outsider folks, into the center and to really question because I feel that we'll find that it's was actually much more central to Black life than we've understood.

And it's particularly to the explosive, cultural work that Black artists have done. Right? I mean, this is where they, they go to get their inspiration, you know? And so I think that it's really important in this moment to remember that, however, it's super hard because this is precisely the time where our ways of being together and sharing space in, in those kind of knotty, wayward, existences are being closed down because of the virus.

Shoniqua Roach: I mean, in some ways. I mean, I just had really robust conversations, text conversations with lots of folks about the Will and Jada sizing up scandal, right? So, I mean, talk about Black sexuality in the public sphere, like!

Mireille Miller-Young: Oh, yeah!

Shoniqua Roach: Prospering opportunities for pleasure and play.

Mireille Miller-Young: So, that's true. It is in the pop culture. It is online. You know, I, I, you know, I'm, I'm a little old school, so I still look for the in-person opportunities. I have to, you know, I can't adapt as well. Some of the young stuff I, I still I still can't find where the DJ is playing on what particular night on, on was that? Instagram.

Michelle and Shoniqua: Instagram. Yeah.

Mireille Miller-Young: Everyone's like, "Did you hear that? That concert last night the DJ set off!" So and I'm like, "No, where? I don't know, I'm not on the right Instagram", I hear.

Michelle McKinley: That. I mean, it speaks to I mean, hearkens back to your point about the digital divide, which is not always about class, right?

Mireille Miller-Young: It can be about age generation as well as location. You know that the internet, I'm in a very rural area right now. It's not always working for me. I'm amazed that it's working right now. So, you know, but if there's a thunderstorm outside, forget it. Right. So, you know, we, we need to remember we're not, you know, the and the same.

And then if we particularly if we think about it diaphanically in terms of Black folks in the Caribbean and, and, and Africa and other places, we're all on very different types of technology based on, you know, where we're at. And, and so the formations and the ways that we share pleasure and intimacy, contact and, and, and create and even create fun, you know, it's going to look different, you know, so we have to be careful about being like, kind of focused in a kind of American-centric in a certain-age centric way.

I, I do feel, though, when I meditate on it, I get that, remember that image and, I think it was like *The Matrix*, the second one where you go down into Zion, which is in the center of the earth, and like Neo's there, and there's like a party, and him and Neo and Trinity are having sex in one room, but like, everybody's dancing and those are like the people who were born free, like, without being born attached to the matrix. And they're like, largely Black and brown people, and they're having this beautiful, like, rave with, like, naked skin and like, natural fiber clothes that they've made. And it's and it's very sensual. And there's dreadlocks moving in their sweat and it's queer and it's, and it's and you have it's like a a BIPOC rave. In the future.

That is actually been a go to meditation image for me. I love that I'm trying to manifest that kind of freedom. I don't want just like I don't want like a freedom of we're free of the machines and now we can go to work. I don't know.

Like, you know, I want to, I want to I want to manifest a freedom that is sexy and sensual and intimate and erotic and personal, and that we can sweat and touch and, and be together and be and be equal and actually be with the earth on the earth of the Earth in a

very different way. In a way that's more balanced, and connected. So that's it's funny, it just been I focus on that image a lot when I think about trying to meditate towards a future.

In the future I'd like to create it is the sensual ones. It is, it is a beautiful one. It's the one in which we can dance and play and just leave out the part where the machines come and destroy it, you know, but, you know that that part, is really, hopeful and exciting for me.

I do feel in terms of what the future looks like that there's going to be a change. Why don't you read that question? Yeah.

Shoniqua Roach: Let me let me ask the question.

Michelle McKinley: So in the immediate brunt of our every day, every minute, every hour, it has often been outside the realm of possibility to construct a Black future. What are your creative projects? Do they feel urgent? Do they feel time sensitive? What are your responses to time right now? What are you reading? What are you listening to? What are you watching?

Mireille Miller-Young: Oh. Oh, Lord, I'm gonna, I'm gonna, like, reveal too much here.

Shoniqua Roach: Can we keep this a secret? Yeah. [laughter].

Michelle McKinley: Absolutely.

Mireille Miller-Young: So funny. Yeah. I've been. I've been a bit out of the loop with all that everybody else is doing. I've been doing that a little bit my own thing. Like I said, I've been meditating on this beautiful, gorgeous scene out of the Matrix as as a future. I've been meditating on a Black woman VP. I can't see her yet, but I feel her coming.

I feel her being president. I feel Biden, if he finishes this first term, that will be his only term. So I feel her. I feel I feel the gathering of strong women coming to the fore. I've been doing, actually, a lot of meditation on developing my intuition and psychic abilities. Funny. And so I, been doing work on that.

I think I've been practicing meditation and practicing, kind of remote viewing techniques and imagining, imagining forward techniques and manifestation.

Shoniqua Roach: Do you have any oracle decks or anything?

Mireille Miller-Young: Yes. I mean, well, I, I use medicine cards and things.

Shoniqua Roach: Oh, I love medicine cards!

Mireille Miller-Young: Yeah. And they're great. And I, I actually have a few people on YouTube that I follow, who have various different decks with Tarot and Oracle. And folks, so

I've been really following like The diviners and readers and those folks, because it gives me a bit of hope just to kind of hear that this president is going is leaving and that this is the turmoil before the end.

And that and, and and I'm going to share this part. Is that one of the ways that I was trying to cope with the death of my mother was to understand what happens when you die. And so I started this is this is why I've gotten to this, with this point, with the intuitive stuff, is that I was trying to to connect with her and that I was trying to understand where she was because I could feel her presence, but I could feel her way, and I would.

I had always thought about it, but I it kind of set me off on a personal journey, and I ended up meeting someone who is a really wonderful, person who's a medium, who is able to connect and bring my mother forward and I laughed so hard because she had the same personality. She was telling jokes. She was saying mean stuff about my mother-in-law.

She was referencing things only she and I knew that. So this lady did, she did a Reiki healing on me.

Shoniqua Roach: That's so special.

Mireille Miller-Young: And, I could feel the top of my brain, like, my head open and all of these kinds of purple spaghetti come out like golden and purple. Like, I kind of want to call it like spaghetti, but it reminds me of those, those things that they had in *Avatar* at the end of their braids where they can kind of connect to the tree that feels, but it's like the connect connecting to spirit through these, these chords. Okay. And, and this woman did a healing on me, and she told me afterwards, she said, I kept hearing your mother say, "baby girl, baby girl", did she call you baby girl? And I was just weeping and was like, yeah, that's what she called me.

And so, this has led me to this question about spirit and, and, and where she is. And, and so if you if a few months ago, when it was a lot of turmoil, I reached out to this lady again and I was and one of the questions I asked her is like, my mom really hated Trump.

Like, what does she think about what's going on now? And my mom said, "Oh, I couldn't be here for that. I had to go!"

Shoniqua Roach: So, I made it out in time. Yes!

Mireille Miller-Young, And I think that that's what happening is, is a lot of a lot of people, a lot of our people are dying because, not just because they didn't want to be here for that, but because actually their, their role is to do work from the other side and to help us through this transition. And what she said is that "I'm more powerful and I'm more useful to you here than I was alive."

Michelle McKinley: Wow.

Mireille Miller-Young: And I was like, really? I want you here, you know?

But it's just like, she's like, you don't understand. He is divinely sent. He's meant to bring the darkness. And so that we see the light. So everyone sees the light and permanently shifts and changes towards justice, towards light, towards inclusion, towards, you know, peace, towards more equality with the earth or equilibrium with the Earth, I should say. And and so I that experience helped give me an enormous amount of faith and comfort.

And, you know, I know some people are skeptical of those things, but it really helped me, and it really helps me just get grounded and feel protected. I feel I meditate on a protective bubble around me, in the family, and I just when I've got to make choices, I check in and try to ask spirit for, the answer. Please show me the answer. And it's also helped me...

Michelle McKinley: And having the altar help having a really because it's, it's a visual check in.

Mireille Miller-Young: It's a portal. And I light candles and incense too, burning sage. Anything you can do to help clear your space.

Shoniqua Roach: Do you have Florida Water?

Mireille Miller-Young: I don't and I don't, I don't know, can you get it online?

Shoniqua Roach: You should be able to.

Michelle McKinley: We go to a bodega to pick it up and. Yeah, like I do rituals and pour it around our home space. We're on a really white street.

Shoniqua Roach: I'm like, protection, protection!

Michelle McKinley: Exactly. You never know when folks, are going to, you know, show their asses, it's interesting.

Mireille Miller-Young: That there's there's a lot of Black women professors who are super spiritual, but we always never spoke about it because we didn't want to lose credibility.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Mireille Miller-Young: Yeah. And but, you know, it's like I'm not proselytizing to this, but I find that my students are also, very interested. I have a couple of students, Black women students who are interested in working on, space making, on healing, on sanctuary, building on, those elements. And I tell them because now everybody's having to redesign their dissertations because we can't do the kind of ethnography.

Yeah, that we had planned. Or at least it's going to be in a different form. But I'm telling them, listen, think about doing the work that's going to be healing for you, that you're going to be able to sit with going forward, not the work that's going to hurt and kind of break you down every time. You, you know, right now, you know, if you want to write about lynchings, maybe do it on the second book, you know, like, like just try to protect yourself because especially our grad students and our students in University of California, we're striking this year on top of everything they have got.

Michelle McKinley: Fired. Right. Didn't Napolitano fires?

Mireille Miller-Young: Yeah. They fired the students at Santa Cruz. The students at Santa Barbara and the other campuses were not. But there was a lot of fear that that would happen. They just elected a new black president of the UC, Michael Drake, the former president, now of Ohio State.

But I don't know. No, because, you know, he's the kind of soft Zionist. He's a company man. We're going to see what happens with, you know, his support for this. But the cost of living, strikes that they were doing Cola strikes. Cola. They, you know, we're absolutely necessary. Our students can't feed themselves, and forget about during the summer.

You know, it's just inhumane that we're we're exploiting, folks this way and not giving them a, a standard of living and the ability to do their work. And so, you know, part of my, suggestion was to them is like, and when, when I mentor them, we always have the conversation about, how are you doing?

And I have 15 grad students that I'm on their committee or chairing their committee. So it's a lot, a lot of work. But I, I, I really care about each and every one of them because I feel like we're going to lose a lot of people, during this, who can't hang on, who aren't supported enough in a holistic way. Because the impact on mental health is huge. These are students. My students at least are ones who are actually paying to, to keep their, their, their parents and, and siblings from being homeless right now.

Shoniqua Roach: That strikes me as incredibly Black feminist advice.

Michelle McKinley: I mean, thank you. I mean, encouraging them to, I don't know, not work on what might be considered hot in the, in the neoliberal academy this month. You know, or.

Mireille Miller-Young: Right.

Michelle McKinley: When they're finishing and who knows what the job market is going to look like. But focusing on work that feels nourishing and healing and grounding.

Mireille Miller-Young: Yeah. And grounding. And I feel like, you know, then, you know, hopefully their excellence will shine through and and we'll be able to get them jobs and positions. But we are facing larger structural issues that none of us are in control of. So I'm also trying to let them know that, "Listen, you're multi-talented. You don't you don't only have to be a professor. There's a lot of things that you can do as well." And, and, and just to know that anybody is lucky to have you and to not internalize. And I think I learned this the hard way. So I want to warn folks that are listening, you know, don't internalize the rejection and the criticism. Don't connect your whole soul to your scholarship in such a way that it doesn't allow you to be mobile, adaptable, you know, or, or feel worthy.

Because they're not going to validate, all the kinds of work that you may want to do, or just because of who you are or they don't give us the same kind of accolades and validation. You know, I last year I won the Teacher of the Year award at UCSB, and I was so happy because I've worked my tail off for 15, going on 16 years there, and I really care. And I've watched so many colleagues just skate by. And here I am, office hours, lines down the halls and hallway. People, you know, because I care and people feel it and they're like, oh, I can talk to you about what to do after college. And I could talk to you about this and that. You know.

Well, I go there to the it's part of a faculty Senate meeting. And as I'm sitting there with the baby in my arms and the other when they were waiting in this hot room with all these people, and there was no microphone, so you couldn't hear, like what people were saying when they were giving the awards. It was so weird.

And my baby said something really loud, and a faculty member who was sitting near me turned to me and said, "That isn't cute".

And I was like, "You see, the work that I did to become a great teacher was at the cost of my own children, because that was time I didn't spend with them."

Michelle McKinley: Right.

Mireille Miller-Young: "So they belong here because they're part of this, you know, they get this award too, for their sacrifice. And they're babies. And who are the hell are you and am I? Am I your mammy? Should I just say yes, ma'am? I'll take them out now. You're right. I don't want to. I don't want to inconvenience you with noise, Karen!"

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Michelle McKinley: Jesus Christ.

Mireille Miller-Young: I'm getting the award here! She's not getting it where? She's sitting there that she didn't get any award! Ever! Come on now! Sorry. I had to get mad for a moment.

Everyone's okay. Okay.

And I didn't mean to call everyone Karens, but you know what I mean by Karens. When you act Karen, we can call you Karen. It's okay.

So what do I what I love, the calling out of Karens. I think it's funny.

But it is. Speaking to what? We can't go swimming. We can't go to the park. We can't birdwatch. We can't. We can't do anything without somebody getting in our face and telling us we don't deserve to be there.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Michelle McKinley: Or just not in that space. Yeah.

Mireille Miller-Young: And that space because that because they're there.

Shoniqua Roach: No, 'cause that's their space.

Mireille Miller-Young: I tell my kiddo all of the time, "you see there, I guess there are rules, but they're only enforced, you know, when we enter into the space." Right?

So, I know she's always wondering what is up with all of this regulation, which she doesn't experience with my co-parent. So, who's a non-Black person? Right. So, Latinx. So, she gets to navigate the world in radically different ways half of the week, right? So, it's like, okay, I was just here with my other parent and we experienced no such regulation? So yeah, really hard lessons about, what it means to be Black in the public sphere.

Shoniqua Roach: Yes. And I think that, you know, my partner is German, so. And like, can my kids, you know, can "pass", I guess, you know, when they're read a different way with me than they are with him. And I have gotten so much hostility, like in playgrounds when they were little and they didn't know how to share the toys, I would take the toys.

I had people just curse me out, take, pick up their child and stomp off, you know, and, and and just really make me feel less than. And, my partner has never had a negative experience ever, with going out with the kids.

So, you know, those are he understands that, that's something that I experience, but he doesn't actually get to see it because also, when he's with me, that's different. You know? So, I'm not making it up. This is, you know, this is this is real. I think, but.

Michelle McKinley: We also have to remember, though, that dads get, like, the Wonder Daddy badge.

Shoniqua Roach: Oh, yeah.

Mireille Miller-Young: Oh, absolutely.

Michelle McKinley: They're out in public lives...

Mireille Miller-Young: Like, you take the child outside? Dad of the year!

Shoniqua Roach: Oh, yeah. You're wearing one of those baby carriers? Awwww!

[Laughter all around]

Mireille Miller-Young: And so I think that that's, It's really unfair, I so when you ask me the question, guys, about what are my creative projects? You know, that has been a tricky one because so much at this moment is been negotiating our survival and, and also trying to do it.

Shoniqua Roach: Yeah.

Mireille Miller-Young: My creative project is, is, is staying alive right now in Covid. But I'm also trying to just work with these kids. So one, they can learn because suddenly we stop learning, and, and, and so they can feel safe. Right? So we do a lot of playing, and I'm kind of just going back to basics with, let's cut paper and glue it with and put glitter on it, you know.

And it's kind of healing because I realized that I used to be an artist.

I used to I'm, I'm, I used to be a painter, photographer, sculptor. I used to do it all. And when I started to get deep into grad school.

I put that aside, and it was almost like every time I tried to go back to it, I would have too much of an analytical mind. I wouldn't be able to like, not judge my work. Or I would feel like pressed for time or feel not creative, just not inspired. So I'm trying to think of ways in which I can really seize this, this moment of creativity and having just doing stuff around the house with the kids, and pour that into my scholarship in a new way and to find, excitement also in the urgency of this moment, where scholarship feels like sometimes meaningless and sometimes like life or death, absolutely necessary.

You know, and I'm trying to push through and I've asked so in terms of you asked about time, that's an interesting question. What is our you're my response time right now. And you know what time is the construct. Time is if you go into a fifth-dimension perspective, you

know, time is just like a line, you know, it's not, you know, for, for, for the ways in which our spirits and souls endure.

They don't live in time. They can see all of time at once, you know, and I've always had a hard time getting my mind around that, this kind of weird, metaphysical sense of time. But that actually is kind of useful now because it reminds me.

That I have imbibed the company line on time.

I was told "you have this many years to make it to tenure, and this is what you have to do every year, and you have to be on time. This is your time." Then I got tenure, and "then you're like, okay, you have this many years to be on time for full professor." And I took that in, and each time I actually exceeded those times, I needed extra time.

And it was Black feminist telling me, "don't worry about their time. That's their time. You got your time. You know, and they'll either have to adapt to your time, or you can find your own place to have your time." You know, like, you know, this is institutional time.

Shoniqua Roach: We were talking about, like.

Mireille Miller-Young: You know, having a having a having a clock in a prison wall. Why? Why you have them locked up forever, like what? What does time mean?

Michelle McKinley: We were talking with Rhaisa Williams, and she was talking about the politics of refusal around allowing the institution to dictate her reproductive time clock.

Mireille Miller-Young: Yes!

Shoniqua Roach: You know, that's resonating.

Michelle McKinley: And it was great for her because as she said, you know, it was the clarity of just owning your own time, just being in, you know, in a state of pregnancy is is. But, you know, Mireille, you were talking about time because you're talking to your mother and you're using that.

In the future, in the present to construct your future, you, you know, she guides your every day. And so you are ready in a very, very fluid relationship in the prison cell. Absolutely. You're not in the prison cell with the clock.

Mireille Miller-Young: No, I that's why I kind of I'm sounding like a, a little bit of a, a guru right now because I'm so deeply.

Shoniqua Roach: I'm taking notes.

Mireille Miller-Young: Thank you. I mean, I, I it's it's what's saving my life is my connection to ancestors, to my family and to spirit. And, and those messages. And when, when I talk to them, they speak in terms of, in the next few years, this is going to happen. They're not like, you know, "you got to be on this time by September."

You know, better putting files in, September 15th, noon, you need to update your bio bib and put your this stuff in. No. They are like "you're working towards this. This is what you're moving towards. Just be okay knowing you're moving towards your future and you are the manifester. You are the magician. You are the, the, the, the divine that can create that." We all are creating our our reality.

And if you want to think about it from a kind of Black political perspective rather than a spiritual one, we certainly have created this moment through our our political grounded work. You know, however way you look at it, we are manifester of our reality. And in fact, Black people are manifesting a new world for everyone.

Shoniqua Roach: Black future is we've been doing that all future, right?

Mireille Miller-Young: We've been doing it. But it's going to be Black women going to the polls. They're going to put this devil down in November. It's going to be Black women who turned the tide, who stand out in 12 hours all day in the heat to vote, you know, and to to mobilize people. It's going to be Black people that save the world.

You know, like, and it just is. That is the arc of justice from slaves to, really the, the, the the, the, the guiding ancestors for a better future. I mean, it's so it's kind of just beautiful and poetic in a way. But that is this this is about, you know, ultimately a kind of cosmic justice that the whole the whole world, you know, the the bats and the pigs in China want to see it.

To and like, they're like, we don't want to pass these diseases, but you need to stop killing us and putting us in this situation, should it.

Michelle McKinley: Like the Combahee say, like "everyone can get some of this."

Mireille Miller-Young: Yes, yes. Come to the table. Everyone can get some. We have your healing right here. And so, yes, I'm. I'm. That is how I'm trying to think about time. I am, I'm supposed to have been going up this year for full professor. I was supposed to have finished my book. Instead, I've went on this whole other journey of healing from the deep mourning I was in of of of deep understanding and of care work for little children. And I still did my job and I still went to Harvard. I still delivered that lecture on Zoom.

Shoniqua Roach: And you still won that damn award.

Mireille Miller-Young: And I still won that damn award, you know.

Shoniqua Roach: But, you know, once those papers.

Mireille Miller-Young: Exactly. And I'm still not done and I still have more work to do and when I'm done with this work, I may be done. I also consulted my, fate, financial consultant recently. I also consulted my retirement person, you know.

And I was like, "okay, how soon can I retire from this, bitch?"

Okay. Working on 59.

Shoniqua Roach: Yeah.

Mireille Miller-Young: I got 15, you know, 15, 14, 15 more years. But, yeah.

Shoniqua Roach: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mireille Miller-Young: I mean, when something else comes down the road or whatever, I'm going to be open to that blessing to, you know, but right now, the, you know, my calling is not just to this institution. It is to be a change agent and a thought leader in a much wider way. So I feel like that's part of why we have to get out of the institutional framework of time is because it minimizes what, you know, our contributions can be into a certain type of work and labor for them that gets extracted.

Right? That very little leftist worth for our own community and our own well-being, because they minimize that kind of contribution. So I am taking out myself out of their time space, because time is always space to, and and and allowing myself to exist and be like I said, the observer but exist in other times and spaces that are not so institutionally bound.

So that I can, you know, basically see the, the, you know, the sky above the trees for what else is out there. And, so other ways that I can bring tools into this institution to remake this institution. Exactly. Because that's that's what we always knew our work was going to be the mandate as soon as we came, we were mandated into transforming the institution.

We just have to be careful that they do their work, too, that they don't just like, lay it on us with no recognition.

Michelle McKinley: The institution has shown its malleability too, and is like incredible ability to adopt, adapt and co-opt. Like Black women's labors and transformational work.

Mireille Miller-Young: So yes. Well said. So that's what I'm saying, is that when you are out of the space time of the institution, you find ways that you can carry your work with you or kind of re-distract re-extract, re-adopt, you know, kind of super adapt, hyper-adapt to you know, white supremacy, which is really, you know, what we're talking around, right? Is the institution was not made for us. They fit us into it but didn't want us to change it. Now they

see that we need to change it. And and really, it's us that knows how to change it. But they don't really want us to change it in ways too much. Right. That's really going to change them.

So, we're in this moment where it's like, where is the, you know, how deep are they invested in this? And, I feel like with, with what's happening right now, there's a lot of different things that schools, going on, but there's just a lot of confusion and like, this whole thing about opening up with Covid, you guys.

Michelle McKinley: In ten days, that's not going to be a possibility.

Mireille Miller-Young: No. How do you think that, first of all, why do they act like people aren't social beings? And if you just socially distanced them in a classroom or make them eat their meals in shifts in the dorm, that they're not going to hang out with each other, they're they're students. That's why they go to college. There's they go to party.

They don't just go to learn. They go to have an experience. They go to be an adult. They go to live. You know, there there is no way to ask children on up to young adults, college students, to go to school safely in this environment. And that's why I've decided that I'm taking my family out of the country. And it breaks my heart because I wanted to be here for the struggle. But, Harriet did say "run."

Shoniqua Roach: [Distant, laughing] Harriet did say run!

Mireille Miller-Young: But you know, the I'm trying to work on a way to go out, and I'm going to be like Josephine was, and France. And, you know, we have a long tradition of Black people who had to who had to get the fuck out,

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Mireille Miller-Young: To save themselves. And you know what? They still contributed to the struggle. They were still important for Black American culture. They, they many times came back with new perspectives and new art. We'll be following in that tradition. We have many traditions. We have many traditions.

Michelle McKinley: It's a great opportunity.

Mireille Miller-Young: And that is ultimately about self-care, because I realized for me to write the book that I really want to write, the next book is called *Hoe* and is about, really a deep dive into this kind of politics of hyper sexuality around, the figure of the hoe, but also around the deep work that Black women are doing, women and femmes are doing in the sexual realm, in sexual labor to transform the struggle and to, you know, this kind of, real kind of, significance to hoing as a political act of pleasure and survival. And, and I want

space, I want the brain space to, to to think of that. And I need to have these kids in school, to do that.

So that is part of my self-care work is, is, is going. And if that means that I have to, you know, redesign the way that I interact with the institution. My department really wants me to come back and be chair in a year. I let them know “I'm not willing to be chair while my children are under five years old.”

“That is not fair to them. So, you can find that interim chair. And then I get back to you. If I'm still interested,” you know, and if I do do it, I need a I need this, and I need that, and I'm going to need this. I'm going to need that, and I'm going to. Yeah. So, that is, that is we have to negotiate with our institutions in ways that make sense.

Thankfully, a lot of institutions gave faculty the choice to be online, but I know there are some institutions that are forcing faculty back to campus, and I don't understand how that can stand.

Michelle McKinley: It won't it won't. All of this is, you know, spitballs and it's smoke and mirrors just to get the. Yeah. It's not going to. Okay, but listen, this has been a wonderful conversation. I think now I think what. We want to do is...

[Fades to music]