Dr. Marta Effinger-Crichlow, AFR Chair and Prof. (00:00:22):
On behalf of African-American studies at New York city college of technology, CUNY, I'd like to welcome each of you to Black Solidarity Day 2020. This event serves as the kickoff for our year long programming theme: Black Lives Lead: We, Too, Sing America! I'm Marta Effinger-Crichlow, African-American Studies Chair and Professor, I want to acknowledge with respect and humility that CityTech sits on the land of the Munsee Lenape and the Canarsie Nations, whose presence you spans thousands of years. This is land stolen by colonizers, which was gained through genocide and forced removal. But through it, all indigenous nations are still here. Still call this land home and still contribute to this region. I also acknowledge that the African Burial Ground is the nation's earliest and largest African Burial Ground rediscovered in the US. It is in lower Manhattan, the remains of enslaved and free Africans are evidence of how Black bodies and spirits helped to build New York. But these bones are also evidence of new York's brutal role in enslavement. These are our truths in the words of Audre Lorde. "So it is better to speak, remembering we were never meant to survive." African-American studies at city tech is an interdisciplinary academic department. Our curriculum research projects and programs center the issues, topics, and questions, and beauty fights and triumphs of Africana communities locally, nationally, and globally. 2020 marks African-American studies. 51st year at CityTech. Our courses and programs have been moved to this online format due to COVID-19. But this department is ever mindful of Sankofa. We go back to the past and bring forward that which is useful. We are in urgent times, this program reminds us of the urgency of our vote, the urgency of our right now. if you have never experienced Black Solidarity Day, I asked that you pay attention to Associate Provost, Dr. Reginald Blake's segment. He provides a brief, yet important overview of the history of Black Solidarity Day, but also watch city tech, students and alum whose contributions here are both insightful and poignant. Finally, I am pleased that our special guest, Dr. Bryonn Bain helps to bring into greater focus. The departments, the Black Lives Lead: We, Too, Sing America! Dr. Bain's presentation is in part a conversation with Dr. Todd Craig, the pairing of these two dynamic, scholars, activists, educators, artists is not an accident. They
are bad. So I hope you will share the video link far and wide. Now I invite you to take into voice of CityTech alum was Mijori Goodwin, who offers her moving rendition of "Lift Every Voice and Sing". Be well, be inspired, be proactive and vote. Thank you.

Mijori Goodwin, CityTech Alum (00:04:08):
Lift ev'ry voice and sing 'Til earth and heaven ring Ring with the harmonies of Liberty Let our rejoicing rise High as the list'ning skies Let it resound loud as the rolling sea Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us Facing the rising sun of our new day begun Let us march on 'til victory is won!

Dr. Reginald Blake, Interim Associate Provost (00:05:58):
The word solidarity connotes unity, communal interests, shared goals, mutual support, and combined action for a singular cause. The genesis of Black Solidarity Day, emanated from the mind of Panamanian born activist, Dr. Carlos E. Russell, and was inspired by the fictional play "Day of Absence" by Douglas Turner Ward. Annually since 1969, it has been observed on the eve of Election Day in November. And its dual purpose is to 1) activate a one day moratorium in which Black folks will demonstrate their economic power by boycotting, abandoning, and be absent from the economic grid and 2) use the Election Eve 24 hour period to discuss the candidates, to contemplate critical issues on which the election hinge and to consider broader strategies for combating systematic racism at all levels --- police brutality, racial inequality and prejudice. Since 1969, there has never been an election that is more consequential. That is more critical, that is more monumental than the presidential election of 2020. Indeed Black Solidarity Day 2020 ought to be spent deepening our resolve, broadening our scope and heightening our engagement in the just cause for full equality for opportunity, for free access. The choice in this election is clear. It's critical and course corrective. Let's therefore go forth and vote. Vote for your past. Vote for your present. Vote for your future. La luta continua!
Dr. Russell Hotzler, President CityTech (00:07:55):

Welcome everyone. Welcome to CityTech's Black Solidarity Day presentation. Black Solidarity Day represents a long standing tradition at CityTech normally celebrated the day before election day, which is Monday, November 2nd, this year. But this year as a result of safety concerns associated with the Corona-19 virus, the program is being presented as a recorded event that will be released Friday, October 30th. I wish to thank the college's African-American Studies department faculty, and in particular Professor Marta Effinger for providing the leadership for this activity, which is supported by students, faculty, and staff across the college by tradition, Black Solidarity Day invites people of African American and African descent to abstain from participating in their regular activities and by peaceful action seeks to demonstrate opposition to racism, social and civil injustices. At CityTech, we have always used this opportunity to encourage people to vote communities of color, especially African Americans have every right to feel that they have long been denied the advantages of afforded to privilege groups. And they have reason to question the responsiveness of the legal system. The notion that justice delayed is justice denied dates back to at least the founding of the country. And the history of our country is filled with a contribution of many peoples, a collective story that can not be told without acknowledging and understanding the many contributions of African Americans and Africans. The University and CityTech strive to stand as a barrier against institutional racism and endeavor to provide our students with an Avenue or advancement against the forces that otherwise push historically disadvantaged populations aside, having been ranked number 10 in the nation as an engine of economic advancement for our students, CityTech is fulfilling that mission and will continue to do so. I would like to extend a sincere welcome to Professor Bryonn Bain and thank him for his participation and contribution to this program. Brooklyn born, he returns to us as an accomplished scholar writer, activists and artists who is committed to movements for justice, criminal justice reform and education. He brings powerful insights and meaning to this event. Thank you. And I know you will enjoy the program.
Dr. Pamela Brown, Associate Provost & VP of AA (00:10:27):
Hi everyone. The Black Solidarity Day celebration is a recognition of the value of learning from the past and then actively engaging in the present in order to help create a better future. We honor the sacrifices, contributions, and achievements of those who came before us. We encourage everyone to understand the issues of the day contributing where possible and taking advantage of the power of voting a power that can lead to a better future for all, by picking compassionate and visionary leaders. Thank you to African-American chairperson, Marta Effinger and her colleagues in the department and across the campus for hosting today's event. Black Lives Lead: We, Too, Sing America! And thanks for to all of you for being here today. I hope you enjoy the event.

Dr. Justin Vazquez-Poritz, Dean of Arts & Sciences (00:11:24):
Hi everyone. I'm Justin Vazquez-Poritz, Dean of Arts & Sciences. I'm so glad you could join us for Black Solidarity Day. I would like to express my gratitude to the African American Studies faculty members for making this event possible. And I would also like to extend a warm welcome to our highly esteemed and internationally acclaimed guest speaker, Dr. Bryonn Bain. The remote nature of this event need not lessen our our desire, nor our ability to use our collective power to bring about social justice. I urge all of you to vote and to encourage your family and friends to vote as well. Thank you.

Instrumental Music (00:11:24):

Luc Telemaque, CityTech Student & BMI Pres. (00:12:23):
Hello. My name is Luc Telemaque of the Black Male Initiative. We are a powerful organization that offers guidance to Black men and women who are often led astray due to a lack of motivation or direction. Today many young Black people who grow up in privileged communities often turn a blind eye on the day-to-day Black struggles, such as police brutality and discrimination, as they have claimed to not yet experienced it. To me, Black Solidarity Day is about standing with our brothers and sisters in their time of need. Whether it affects you or not.
Dr. E. Boone, AFR Faculty, D Baptiste & A. Camacho, AFR 1321 Students:

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother. They send me to eat in the kitchen When company comes, But I laugh, And eat well, And grow strong. Tomorrow, I’ll be at the table When company comes. Nobody’ll dare Say to me, “Eat in the kitchen,” Then. Besides, They’ll see how beautiful I am And be ashamed— I, too, am America. I too sing America. We, too sing America, vote, vote, vote.

Instrumental Music:

Dr. Todd Craig, AFR 3000ID & Associate Prof., MEC:

Okay. Welcome. New York City College of Technology community. Uh, my name is Dr. Todd Craig and I teach, Black New York in the African American Studies Department. Um, while we're here, I want to give a quick shout out to AFR, of course. I also want to give a shout out to Black New York for fall 2020. What's good. Everybody. We are here today for our Black Solidarity Day, uh, keynote panel. Um, the theme of Black Solidarity Day for 2020 is Black Lives Lead. We, Too, Sing America! And the AFR department is very excited to have with us, uh, Bryonn Bain. So I'm going to introduce him, give you some information on who Bryonn is and then Bryonn and I will be in conversation. We're going to watch some of his work. He's doing some very, very powerful, uh, advocacy work. Um, very powerful multimedia work and is really, really about trying to make sure that all of us in that we, too, sing America, that all of us are singing in and doing our best at it. So Bryonn Bain is Brooklyn's own prison activist, actor, hip hop theater innovator, and spoken word poetry champion is described by Cornell West as an artist who speaks his truth with a power we desperately need to hear. His theater, film and television work are critically acclaimed from his award-winning BET Talk show "My 2 cents"; Emmy nomination for "BAAD Sonia" to this year's Emmy award for "LA Stories". Playing over 40 characters in his one-man theater production "Lyrics from Lockdown". It is executive produced by Harry Belafonte and tells the story of Bain's wrongful imprisonment through hip hop theater, spoken word poetry, blues, Calypso, comedy, and letters exchange with fellow poet and friend Nanon Williams, who is wrongfully sentenced to death row at just 17 years old. For its record-breaking runs at the actors' gang theater in LA, his one man show won awards for best solo performance from LA Weekly in 2018 and
from the NAACP in 2019. Wrongfully imprisoned in his second year at Harvard Law. Bryonn sued the NYPD and told his story for 20 million viewers on 60 minutes in an interview with Mike Wallace. After writing the Village Voice cover story walking while Black, the bill of rights for Black America, his worked received the largest response in the history of the nation's most widely read progressive newspaper. Bain produced the "Lyrics from Lockdown" tour, which reached 25 states and spanned higher education courses using the performing arts to build literacy in prisons nationwide. Bryonn founded and directs the prison education program at UCLA where he is developed and taught arts-based courses and programs in LA prisons, including the California Institute for Women; Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall, CampJoseph Scott and Central Juvenile Hall. Bain's work has been featured at the Apollo Theater, Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Public Theater in New York City, National Black Theater in Harlem, New Jersey Performing Arts Center, the Actors' Gang Theater in Culver City, Los Angeles Theater Center Festival -- Festival de L.E.J. in Belgium? ... M One Theater Festival in Singapore; University de Las Americas in Mexico. Um, the, the list just continues on. Bryonn is also currently an Associate Professor in the African American Studies department at UCLA. CityTech community. It is, it is really truly an honor to be here and conversation with Bryonn Bain. Bryonn, thank you so much for being here with us today.

Dr. Bryonn Bain, BSD Guest Speaker (00:18:13):
Thank you brother. Thank you, Dr. Craig, for the powerful introduction. I want to say how much I appreciate that. And I appreciate you for all of your work as a scholar, committed to the liberation of Black folks and of human beings around the planet. Uh, it's an honor to be here with you big shout out to the CityTech community, uh, to the CUNY community more broadly. And I want to just say it's such a pleasure to be here in this moment and celebration and recognition of Black solidarity. Uh, I want to just really highlight, uh, an important distinction, uh, in terms of thinking about solidarity. I don't think there's been a more important moment in our history to think about solidarity than right now. And I wanted to distinguish between sort of a moderate solidarity limited to just advocacy of reform, respect, freedom for all, which is all important. Uh, but I want to distinguish that from a radical solidarity, which is really about demanding the fundamental transformative change of systemic and structural inequities. And I believe that that radical solidarity is division that we need to be most committed to right now.
Dr. Todd Craig (00:19:22):
Right? Absolutely. And your work runs squarely in the lane of that radical solidarity. And so what I want to do is, uh, and we're going to talk about it in between, but I want to start getting into some of these pieces that you have because the work is powerful and it's so timely, especially in this moment where, um, for Black and Brown folks, this is probably one of the most important Black Solidarity Days because it comes the day before one of the most important elections that we've seen in our lifetime. Um, so let me, let me give you the opportunity to present this first clip. And then let's go into that. And then let's, let's talk about it as soon as the clip is over.

Dr. Bryonn Bain (00:20:11):
Absolutely. So I, this piece, uh, inspired in many ways by what's happening in the world right now, but also a mentor of my mentor is a brother by the name of Paul Robeson. And Paul Rosen said famously that "artists are the gatekeepers of truth. They are society's radical voice." And I think right now, what are the truth that needs to be heard is just about the two pandemics we're facing the pandemic of the Corona virus COVID-19, which has taken the lives of over 200,000 people in this country alone and effected millions around the globe and the long-standing pandemic of white supremacy, right? Which even Albert Einstein, not known for his comments on race and racism, as much as his contribution to science, but said himself, because he was an ally/colleague of Paul Robeson and. Einstein himself said that racism is a disease. White supremacy is a disease. And so we're dealing with these two diseases simultaneously. And so in recognition of our elders of our ancestors and recognition of the Native people, whose land we are on, if we're anywhere in the United States, this piece is speaking to the urgency of understanding that we are living in the midst of these two pandemics. And unless we treat them as such, we will not be as equipped as we need to be to fight them and to bring them to an end.

Dr. Todd Craig (00:21:38):
Okay. And with that, we are going to get in to this first clip and Bryonn, What's the title of this first one piece is called.

Dr. Bryonn Bain (00:21:47):
It's called racism is a pandemic.
Dr. Todd Craig (00:21:49):
Okay? Everyone sit tight tune in with us as we watch this piece and then stick around, don't go anywhere. We're coming right back.

Racism is a Pandemic Recording (00:21:49):

Dr. Todd Craig (00:25:25):
Um, to say that the work is just powerful. Doesn't do it enough justice. Um, you said that, let me ask you this and part of me, because I'm still the, the images and the visuals. Um, and the words that you shared are so visceral, um, that it almost brings us back to some of these moments that we've seen in the past four or five, six months. Um, let me ask you this. How do you see racism as a pandemic? Speaking of what your life has been as an artist and an educator?

Dr. Bryonn Bain (00:26:12):
Well, I I've had the opportunity. I've lived in Brooklyn most of my life, but I've also been fortunate and blessed to travel, to see other parts of the world. Uh, you know, I have family in, uh, in Trinidad, where my parents are from. And In Venezuela, just seven miles over the water, uh, cousins who don't speak any English. He only speaks Spanish. I have family in Panama. I have family in India, you know, uh, the Trinidad is about half and then my mom's side is from South Asia. So I had the opportunity to be in these parts of the world and I have seen the impact of white supremacy, um on folks around the planet and empire and imperialism as a global force is something that we are better equipped to deal with once we understand it's not just on our block, right. You know, it's bigger than even the cop on your block. Obviously that's the immediate thing you're facing. That's the immediate face you might be facing of it. But when you begin to get exposed to how in New York and LA and I've had the chance to actually teach in the two largest jail systems, the cities with the largest justice systems on the planet, right in New York and LA right. LA Rikers for many years was at 20,000 people on Rikers back in the nineties. LA uh, until recently had about 17,000. And so when you begin to see how our families are being disrupted and broken up 3000 miles apart, right, when you go to Latin America and you see the effect of shad-ism, you know, when you turn on the TV and everybody looks in the novellas and the news looks white and the Indigenous and Black people only exist as maids and servants and criminals, right. That's how they're portrayed. Right? You begin to see in India how the darker people, the Dalit people, the so-called untouchable
caste, the people are the darkest people, people most directly descended and most immediately descended from Eastern Ethiopians. Right. Uh, so you begin to see that there was a global phenomenon of white supremacy, uh, which also should remind us that we actually have global allies and the struggle to overthrow imperialism and empire. And so, uh, that is sort of the, the macro level of how I see my work as an artist, as an activist, as a scholar. Uh, but I also understand that you have to actually address the local and the global at the same time. And that's how I see the mission of my work.

Dr. Todd Craig (00:28:37):
Right? No. And, and one thing that you touch on and I think is really important. Um, not only for our CityTech students, but also the larger CUNY community is I think sometimes kind of along the lines of that radical solidarity, we spend a lot of time separating ourselves. And so even though this is a Black Solidarity Day event, how much more powerful would we be if we all aligned in ways that really addressed the ways in which we're sort of separated, um, with, with this sickness of, of white supremacy, not only just in Brooklyn or in New York or on the East Coast or in America, but, but this is a global thing. Um, darker people in various places, um, are cast out similarly to how Black folks are in America. So really embracing that solidarity, I think is a really, really important piece of the work that you're doing.

Dr. Bryonn Bain (00:29:37):
I mean, we had 350 cities around the world rising up, right in wake of the murders of BreonnaTaylor and George Floyd. You know, so I think this is a moment where the world is also in certain ways shrinking because you have millennials and young folks on devices in Brooklyn, in conversation with, you know, young folks in the car, young folks in Tokyo, right. Young folks in, you know, all over the globe. So I think in that sense, this is a time where, you know, there are unique obstacles that we're facing unique challenges that we're facing, right. We have a resurgence of overtly racist attacks from the right misguided methods for redistributing resources by the nonprofit industrial complex on the left. Right. But I think at this moment, if we can use the tools at our disposal to call for a re-imagining of solidarity in ways that are really necessary to build effective movements for social justice and human rights, and we will put ourselves in a different position moving forward.
Dr. Todd Craig (00:30:36):
Right. And, and another interesting piece too, is that, um, part of us being in this moment, um, is this idea of how the pandemic with the Corona virus has shut the ways in which we normally move down so that there was no way to avoid seeing George Floyd. There was no way to avoid, um, sort of bringing Breonna Taylor's situation back to the forefront. Um, I think we're normally we'd be on trains and cars on buses, moving around doing our regular day-to-day thing and it's sort of lessens that impact. Whereas now we're all kind of at home or watching this at the same time in real time. I think that has been something that has brought us together and brought young folks all across the globe together, um, on these devices. Uh, let me ask you the second question for, for all of the young artists, um, as an artist and as a creative, what would you say is the responsibility of the artist during this moment of a twin pandemic?

Dr. Bryonn Bain (00:31:59):
Well, the words of Assata Shakur, you know, really resonate with me powerfully and in response to that, you know, she says, "it's our duty to fight for freedom. It's our duty to win, we must love and protect each other. We have nothing to lose, but our chains," right. And I believe that is, uh, my understanding of what, uh, is needed from artists more now than ever before. Right. To be in some ways, the imagination, all right, that imbues our movements with possibilities beyond those that we're in right now, you know, to, to really take the moment to say, look, we understand where we've been. And that gives us great insight into our possibilities. Right. We stand on the shoulders of giants so much has been accomplished by those who came before us. But then there was a world that they could not possibly have seen with their eyes that were on the precipice up. Right. And so I challenge artists to, to, to defy the cliches, to defy what has been done to imagine what has not been done. And, you know, I had a mentor who said to me, and mentors have been an incredible part of my journey from, you know, from beginning to, to, to now and will always be one of my mentors said, you know, you can sing and dance just like Michael Jackson, the world wouldn't need you. They already had him. Right. You know, if you could, if you could hit them notes, like Stevie Wonder, you know, if you could play an instrument like Prince, if you could do it just like them, the world would not have any use for you. Cause we already had them. What we need you to do is to, for you to be the best you, you can be, right? Because no one has your experience. No one has your voice. No one has the thing, the story that you have to tell. And so we got to draw on all
those other folks; be inspired by them. And in some ways oftentimes emulate them to sharpen our steel and develop who we are. But ultimately each of us here for the short period of time, from womb to tomb, we have a contribution to make and, a purpose to fulfill and finding that purpose and finding our voice is what I urge every artist within the sound of our voices to take on.

Dr. Todd Craig (00:34:02):
Okay. Um, and I think you mentioning, um, Assata Shakur who runs throughout your work, um, and racism is a pandemic. Um, Breonna Taylor really, really stands sort of in the forefront of some of that work. And one of the things that I think is, is really just intriguing and powerful about your work is some of the work that you are doing specifically around women of color, specifically around Black women. And so, um, and I know one of, one of the mentors that you talk about in your work, um, and also kind of in conversation is, is your mother. And so what I want to do is, I want to segue into this next piece. And then when we come back, I want to begin to have a conversation about some of those key women figures and mentors in your life that have really helped you sort of form who you are today. So let me give you an opportunity to introduce this next piece.

Dr. Bryonn Bain (00:35:05):
Absolutely. My pleasure. And I just, I think in, in a nutshell when Black women lead things generally are better, right? That's, that's a lesson from my life, right? And, uh, my first mentor, my first teacher was my mother. Uh, she, you know, might not call herself a feminist, but she is, and she's a matriarch. And I see a whole lot of matriarchal families around me everywhere I look, we just need to acknowledge, recognize and uplifted. And it doesn't mean that we absolve ourselves as men of the role and the, that we have. It just means we can also use our privilege to create space for Black women and women of color to lead. So this piece was inspired by another mentor of mine. Harry Belafonte, who in 1956 was the first person to sell a million records with just his album called Calypso. My father was the Calypsonian, and he sang Calypso music, but this particular clip. So Mr. Belafonte asked me to re-imagine and to rerecord some of his classics and bring some new energy to them. Wow. Is my version of his classic celebrating sisters, women of color and the most powerful way that I know how this is "Man Smart, Woman Smarter."

Dr. Todd Craig (00:36:20):
We're going to go right into that. And I just want to give a shout out to Mrs. Bain because your mother has done some incredible work. I want to give a shout out to Ruth Machida, my mother, she passed away last year, but she is so here in the room with us right now. And with that shout out to everybody's mother everywhere, let's get into this "Man Smart, Woman Smarter."

"Man Smart, Woman Smarter" Recording (00:36:20):

Dr. Todd Craig (00:41:11):
Um, I'm just going to go out on a limb Bryonn and assume that the fact that Harry Belafonte is asking you to remix that work. Um, you want to share with us just really quickly, what type of honor that is?

Dr. Bryonn Bain (00:41:28):
Oh man. I just, you know, he asked me to do a number of tracks and you know, my first reaction was. Who me? You know, like, you know, I'm like, I see you, you hanging out with Usher at Sing Sing Prison for the graduation and Maxwell and Aloe Blacc and all these folks who got so much range on me. But, uh, you know, he said, you know, you said you approached your singing the way that I did, you know, uh, first as a, as a Caribbean, as a Caribbean person, as a Caribbean man and also as a theater person. Right. Um, and I think that connection, you know, growing up with Calypso him, you know, being called the Calypso King, even though he never claimed that title for himself, you know, I think that Caribbean connection, um, that theater connection was a part of it. And I got say I recorded a couple of things and he was kind of like, ah, I think you can do better brother, but he did not punches he did not pull any punches. And, you know, I had to the blessing to go fortune of spending three, four hours with him, his daughter, Gina Belafonte, who was my director. And they would literally kick my ass after rehearsals for three, four hours at a time. And, you know, he would stop in the middle of it and say, "yeah, no, you can push back on this if you want, you know, it's, it's fine." I was like push back, I can't even afford this time with you brother. I'm just please continue doing what you're doing because in between him being, you know, being very critical and very serious with me, you know, saying, you know, I respect the message, but if the message is, is at one level and the artistry is below, you actually do a disservice to the movement, right. You need to actually make sure your artistry, your aesthetics are at a high level as possible. Right? So that the message you're carrying, actually they do justice to each other, you
know? And so I was, I was very blessed and fortunate to have that, to have him give me lessons, to talk through his experiences. All he saw at 26, getting a call people saying, Oh, there's this Martin on the phone wants to talk to you for some advice. To have Martin Luther King at 24, call up Mr. B, Mr. Belafonte at 26 and say, I need your help. Because as an artist, you're doing something you've got the people's eyes and ears, and I need to build with you about how we can make this movement something more than just what it would be without you and the artists that you were bringing. I mean, that just, you know, for me, it shapes my understanding of what, what the power and possibility of art is. And if it's only shaped by understanding what we see in sort of in the mainstream media, corporate media, right, we get a limited sense of like, you know, artists or just people who wear shiny clothes and, you know, you know, make it rain. Right. And I think having mentors, having elders who see what he's seen, you know, facing off the Klu Klux Klan, when he and Sidney Poitier took money down to the, to the Civil Rights Movement in Jackson, Mississippi after three civil rights, activists got killed, right. You know, being fearless in that way, using his platform and his privilege to elevate others, not just artists, but organizers. I really, that has helped me to understand that the role of artists is not necessarily to lead the movement, right? We need good leadership, but also to uplift the movement and to be a voice that can uplift what the people have decided we need to do and what our leadership has decided we need to do.

Dr. Bryonn Bain (00:44:49):

So I feel like that's a particular kind of way to lead, which also sometimes can be leading from behind or just uplifting and listening and paying attention to the way The Last Poets and Langston Hughes, who, you know, this event is partially named after, right? Langston listened to the folk, listen to the people when he wanted his poetry, his art to reflect the voices he heard in Harlem, the way The Last Poets affected the voices they heard in Harlem and the Black Arts Movement, the sister movement to the Black Power Movement was about giving voice to the people where the people were and not elevating sort of these often elite privileged notions of what art should be that really maintain the status quo and the leaders that has really --- that has always suppressed Black art and Black culture. Right. And I think that's part of the history of the tradition that we've inherited Black art, Black culture has always been despised initially before ultimately being embraced. And then co-opted, and then taking another direction. Right. Jazz as a, as a, as a lawyer, as a student of law, you know, I understand that early in jazz history,
there were actually lawsuits where communities sued the jazz clubs because they said they didn't want the jazz to get into their babies. Right. It sounds ridiculous. Right. But the same way the blues was being seen as the devil's music, Robert Johnson famously sold his soul to the devil play the guitar so well, right. Uh, rock and roll was seen as, as a devil's music, right. Hip hop, right. Is, is, and its inception as a fad. It's not even music it's right. Um, and then now it's a multi-billion dollar global art form. This is the history of our art and our culture. And you know, at the end of the day, you just gotta say, Hey bite, all you want, we'll make more. But, uh, it's, it's beautiful to know that we are a part of that long tradition and we continue that tradition and what we do and, and our elders and our ancestors are still here providing us the inspiration to move forward.

Dr. Todd Craig (00:46:46):
Indeed. Uh, one of the things that I, I do want us to think about is, um, you know, you, you are formally trained as a lawyer. You went and you went to Harvard Law. Um, one of the most powerful pieces of your story is, uh, this piece where you are wrongfully arrested and I am going to leave our CityTech community to, um, and this is an easy thing to do. You can go right onto YouTube and do a search for Bryonn Bain "60 minutes". And you can see Bryonn chopping it up with, with Mike Wallace, about how it is that he is while he is in New York city, but also a second year Law student at Harvard University. The, the powerful part about that story though, is you kind of go on from there, you, you write this Village Voice piece. And then, um, one of the things that intrigued me about that video was then when Mike Wallace asked you, did your mother know? You say, no, she found out when the Village Voice piece came out and then her response was, you know, we can't let this stand. We have to fight this. You're not going to be able to let this just sit. So I want to give you an opportunity to, to talk about, um, how this work that you are doing with, with "Man Smart, Woman Smarter" -- sort of your mom being that first real mentor for you. Yeah.

Dr. Bryonn Bain (00:48:25):
So my mother I've seen her struggle her whole life. She worked three jobs for most of my life. You know, everything from, you know, being a nurse, a registered nurse, working in critical situations, ICU nurse to Charge nurse, you know, to taking care of elderly folks, convalescent homes, you know, to at times taking care of white folks who are rich and wealthy and, you know, being in their homes and, and you know, that she really wanted for me to be a doctor that was her wish to
be a healer the way she was. But, uh, you know, I was, I was on a different path. I tried to tell him ma, you know, I'm a Juris doctorate, JD, right? She said, boy, if you count prescribe medicine and I thought, well, doctor, right. You know, so I had to fall back on that, but, but I do know that her commitment to people and to humanity is something that drove me. And when I had my experiences with, with the police and, you know, she looked at me and, you know, after time passed and I had more experiences like you, like you brother Todd, I know you've had your experiences with the police being in handcuffs in Cambridge and other spaces. And so this is not a rare thing for Black men and women in this country to experience, but the opportunity that I had to fight it right, to sue the NYPD and to win and then to transport, to transfer that situation, that energy into the opportunity to do work in places like Rikers Island brings students from NYU and Columbia, from the new school in to work at Boystown Detention Center in Brooklyn. It brings students from LIU and, you know, to take artists and educators, activists in the prisons in 25 states around the country with Blackout Arts Collective, right, uh, to, to build with a brother. And I, by the name of Eddie Ellis from Central Brooklyn, who did 25 years in prison for a crime, he didn't commit. And his organization, the center for new leadership, right, which spawned a new organization, CCD Community Capacity Development, which my brother K Bain, who does violence interruption work in 18 different projects. That launched me into this whole other career. And it really is why I'm right now in LA, at UCLA directing the prison education program there. Because in the way that I talk about remembering and identifying and committing to the leadership of Black women and women of color, right. I also recognize that the leadership is going to end mass incarceration. That's going to bring us mass decarceration has to involve, has to be led by people who are incarcerated and formerly incarcerated. It has to be involved with people who are system impacted. You can't have a movement for women's liberation led by men, right? You can't have a movement for queer folks and queer liberation led by straight folks. You can't have a movement for Black liberation led by white folks. They can be allies. They can be supporters. We need that from all quarters. But the movement to end mass incarceration has to be, be led by. It has to have in its leadership, people who are incarcerated and formerly incarcerated. And I've learned that through my experiences in places like Rikers Island and Sing Sing with Hudson Link, in Wallkill Prison, where we started the NYU program in Folsom Prison, where I did concerts with Common and Mike Epps and J Cole and, and, uh, Scott Budnick. And I realized that, you know, it's really an interesting phenomenon, but while so many folks, my brother Cheyenne
just came up from five years in federal prison. He did some time in, uh, the Metropolitan Detention center here in Brooklyn, which is the largest detention center in the country. And you know, it's been hard for him to transition into the workforce because even though you serve your time, right, you do your time and you let your time serve you. You come out and it strikes you against you. When in fact folks who come out of prison often work harder, outperform other folks hands down. And I found that in the prisons while there were some folks who were concerned well, will these students at the Women's prison, oldest prison for women in California, CIW, where we started the UCLA program, will they be able to handle the academic rigors that UCLA students are accustomed to UCLA as the most applied to public institution in the country, possibly the world 138,000 people applied to go to UCLA last year. Now edged out Berkeley as the number one public institution in the state of California. So there were concerns. And what we found is that the students, the women, yeah. CIW Prison, they were hungrier. They were more passionate. They were more committed. They sometimes did the reading two and three times and would come to me and say, professor bane, I saw on page 17 of your second book, you said this, but in class, like last week, you said something else. And the reading said this, so how do you reconcile that? And I'm thinking, what did I write in my second book, Lord have mercy. You even called it back to me. You know? So they blew the university students out the water and the university students loved it because they never felt more engaged. They never felt more challenged. And the everyone, every student, every faculty member that I've had in the last five years coming to any of the prisons, juvenile halls in LA has been completely transformed, become committed to this work, found their purpose and across the board, I haven't had any students tell me anything, but this was the best class they've ever had. They've ever taken. Not because of me, but because the students are half university students, half incarcerated students. And I believe the final piece we're going to show, we'll give a little bit of a glimpse into one of those classroom experiences. And I don't feel like the work is done. I feel like it's always a work in progress. And I want to just say one more, share one more piece from another Black woman who inspires me, Angela Davis, who says in her book, "Abolition Democracy," which we've made the common book this year in my departments that UCLA. Angela Davis is "Abolition Democracy" is the common book and Ava DuVernay's "13th" is the common film for everyone to read and develop programs around. And in "Abolition Democracy" as Angela Davis says, "A victory is not so much to secure change once and for all, but rather to create new terrains for struggle." And so
when my 18 year old son who's just finished his freshman year at Howard university, says to me, dad, all these smart people did all this great work and look at where we're at. We're still fighting white supremacy. We're still fighting against all the environment being saved, the planet, being on the verge of of destruction and people on the verge of extinction. How can we change things if those before us, could I change things? And I think about these words from Angela Davis, right? You know, "the victory is not about change once and for all is to create new terrains for struggle." And so if we can move the struggle forward in our work and our art, in our activism, in our scholarship, then we have actually served our purpose in some measure.

Dr. Todd Craig (00:55:24):
Absolutely. And I want to share really quickly and I want to get us into this next piece. Um, and I think this is important to, to share, um, you know, one of the reasons that your work resonates with me so much is because, um, I was at Harvard in the Graduate School of Education. My first real interaction with police is in New York. Um, I will never forget it is the day after Christmas in 1998. Um, and the police officers saw my Harvard ID and everything, and I did not stop them from proceeding on with doing what it is that they needed to do or what they felt they needed to do in that moment. Um, but I think what becomes important about that is we continue to push forward. Um, and, and I hope that that is a testament for any of the students out there who are in the midst of any of the difficulties and the struggles are that happen in Brooklyn because these things are real and tangible things. And they are things that kind of are placed in front of us as challenges to get us off the course that we're on. Um, so there is that part I want to share, but I also want to say, and I think this is super duper important. Um, please let Mrs Bain know that even though you are not writing prescriptions, that you are doing a particular sort of healing in a different way, that becomes important. Um, you, you are doing healing for the incarcerated and you are specifically doing a certain type of healing, not only for these UCLA students, but these women who are in this California institution. So with that, I want to get into this work that you're doing with the UCLA students and, um, the California Institute. So we're going to go right into that right now. Stay with us, Bryonn Bain, Black Solidarity Day. Let’s watch this work.

UCLA & CIW Recording (00:55:24):
Dr. Todd Craig (01:03:52):
CIW Narratives of Change. Um, such a good moment to see the work that you are doing in real time. And action on one of the questions I want to talk, I want to ask you is, uh, talk about, talk a little bit about who's in that class and how this space sort of reflects that radical solidarity Oh. That you were talking to us about earlier.

Dr. Bryonn Bain (01:04:22):
So I'm, I'm excited to say that at least three of the women in that class have since been released, um, and that's like a real, a real blessing, you know, to have the opportunity to work with them on the inside, you know, to advocate for their parole. You're right. Um, and you know, to see them outside, two of them have been to UCLA's campus, have been guest speakers, come and talk to students, help train students and help train faculty and how to actually enter into the space. That's a part of it. You know, I learned from Eddie Ellis and set up new leadership, a bunch of the folks who survived Attica, went to Greenhaven Prison in New York, started some of the first think tanks, right? Those think tanks at Greenhaven Prison influenced think tanks at Graterford Prison in Pennsylvania with Temple University, which created what's commonly referred to as the Inside Out Program, but was a model we use.

Speaker 6 (01:05:09):
We just don’t use that particular name because it's influenced by the same elders, but it went in a slightly different direction. But that think tank model, we took CIW on the other side of the country. And so those women you saw on the video, they became the think tank and that think tank begin developed the structure for how we've done every orientation for students and faculty ever since. So we still include them in DNA and the leadership of our work. Right? And I think, you know, we, they designed this, this orientation that we do, where we talk about trauma, we talk about privilege. We talk about assumptions. We talk about academic integrity. And we talk about protocol. All of these things that they felt were important, we maintain today. I think that's where the radical solidarity comes from is recognizing that oftentimes the folks who are closest to the problem are also closest to the solution and create using your privilege to create space for those folks to lead you and to guide you. And I'm burdening them with that because we still have a role to play. But also recognizing that oftentimes these are the folks who've been left out of the conversation. And particularly at this moment, when we are on the verge of having probably the greatest voter
turnout in American history in recorded history, right? It's so necessary. Folks who do that. And I encourage folks to vote because folks bled and died for us to have the right, the opportunity to vote. But I also am clear voting is just a small part of what we need to do a small part of participation, which is the bigger deal.

Dr. Bryonn Bain (01:06:46):

And last story I'll share with you is a mentor of mine by the name of Kelis Parker, Dr. Kellis Parker, uh, brother Maceo Parker from George James Brown's original band Parliament Funkadelic. He was a law professor, first Black, uh, law professor at an Ivy League school taught at Columbia. I snuck into his classes in undergrad. So I could see who was his law professor, who was teaching law, using his trombone and using jazz principles. It blew my mind. And Dr. Parker said, I'll never forget. He said, you know, a good democracy should function like my favorite jazz bands, right? A good democracy he said should function like the jazz band that has somebody on keys, who's jammin', right? Who gets to solo. Somebody who's on bass who's jam. He gets somebody on the 'bone. Who's jammin'. He gets to solo, right? Somebody who has who's playing and gets to solo. And, but then we all play together. But every voice is heard. And we are in a moment where we're not, this country is not functioning as a full democracy because every voice is not heard. We know this, we know that folks have lost their right to vote in many cases, when they come home from prison. We know that in every prison, except for in every state, except for Vermont and Maine folks can not vote while they're in prison in DC jail, you can vote while you're in prison. But for the most part, we don't have it like most of Europe, which can vote all the tip of the Soviet countries can vote while they're in prison. Our voices need to be heard. We need to demand that our voices be heard. And it's not just about getting the fascist out of the White House. It's also about every single race up and down the ticket. And seeing voting is not a strategy that's going to actually bring revolution, revolution, not on the, on the ballot. Right? Folks voted for Barack Obama said we got a Black president. We're dumb. We could fall back. No, I voted for him twice. I might vote from a third time, but let's be clear. A Black on the white power structure is still a white power structure. And so we need to hold the feet to the fire of what we put in office. So when Biden and Harris, when we need to be prepared to hold their feet to the fire, to force them to be accountable, like we force everybody up and down the ticket to be accountable. Folks, those elected to the Senate, to be accountable. Those in our local elections to be accountable, folks need to recognize the prosecutors. DAs are elected into office and they have incredible
power, right? Oftentimes forcing plea deals, plea deals and plea agreements on our young, Black and Brown youth who are see no other option, but to take these ridiculous sentences. And so we can begin to make change by actually voting, but also following the voting up with organizing raising consciousness is a part of it. It's not enough in the law. We had this phrase necessary, but insufficient. And it is necessary, but insufficient to vote. You have to do it, but it's not all you need to do. It is necessary, but insufficient to raise awareness, raise consciousness. We also need to mobilize. We need to mobilize and organize to demand the changes that we want to see in the world around us.

Dr. Todd Craig (01:09:49):
No, absolutely. And two things that I, that I just appreciate so much with you sharing with our students is this idea of up and down the ticket, right? We, we kind of think about the presidency, but we don't think about sort of those senators and those governors and those mayors and those prosecutors, all of those other officials sort of down the ticket, we are still voting for them. And so they do need to be held accountable and we can make sure that those representatives, again, they are it, and they are supposed to be representing us and representing our best interests. And that is part of what we do with the vote is give them an opportunity to represent us. But then we have to do the work to make sure that they continue to do what they said they were going to do.

Dr. Bryonn Bain (01:10:35):
That's right. Did you say Professor West' [course] American Democracy?

Dr. Todd Craig (01:10:40):
I did not. I did not get a chance to. I ran into him so many times on, in Harvard Square and it was the power of seeing just walking towards the tee and you see him and he's like, what's good brother? You know what? That looks like.

Dr. Bryonn Bain (01:10:57):
And, and I think, you know, it's, it's funny because he used to always say in class, he used to say, you know, "a democracy comes from two Greek words, brother Demos and Kratos, the most is the people and Kratos means to rule and that stayed with me, you know, cause he's such preacher, even in his black suit and gold cufflinks and sitting in front of the classroom, he's such a preacher, but that stayed with me. Demos Kratos, the people rule, which means the people set the
rules, the people make the rules that has not been the history of this country. But if we want the future of this country, if we imagine a future that is different from that part of its past, it starts with us participating, getting involved and not acting like casting a vote is enough. But the casting a vote is the beginning for many folks of being more involved in the process of building change and building movements because movements, movements is how we build lasting change.

Dr. Todd Craig (01:11:51):
Right? And the other piece that I think is just so powerful hearing you talk about is this idea of how the arts are able to influence the academy, but then also how you're able to have, you know, you have a law degree from Harvard. No one necessarily thinks that someone was coming out of Harvard with the law degree is going to go into the arts and going to go into activism. So being able to have that as sort of a model that students can use, I think is such powerful work. Um, and it's just an awesome way for students to be able to see how their different interests can lead them down different paths. And it doesn't have to be the standard path. It can be a path that you trailblazer yourself.

Dr. Bryonn Bain (01:12:41):
Absolutely. Absolutely.

Dr. Todd Craig (01:12:44):
One question I have to ask you because this question I think is critical. Um, when you are sitting with Mike Wallace, he asked you if you want to be a politician and you say no immediately, and you say this, I want to be an organizer and activist and educator and artist politics turns me off because everybody is afraid to tell the truth and people are afraid to call it like they see it. What would 2020 Bryonn Bain sitting here and conversation with me now tell Bryonn Bain in 1999, 2000, who's being interviewed by Michael Wallace, knowing what you know now, what would you tell that younger self? What advice would you give?

Dr. Bryonn Bain (01:13:38):
That's a tough question. That's, that's a really, really good question. And I think, I think even as I had community around me to support me at elders around me to support me, you know, I always still had my doubts and my insecurities, you know what I'm saying? I, it was an old saying, you know, a Harvard has ruined more Negroes and bad whiskey, you know? And I felt like at times, uh, even though I
was there at like, you know, the oldest, most elite legal institution in the country, I felt oftentimes like I was surrounded by people, many people whose fundamental assumptions about the world were very different from my own. You know, I had gone to public school, you know, I came from a working class, immigrant Black family. Right. Um, and you know, I was around people who, the guy across the hall from me, you know? So what are your parents that sit on? My father would, he's a teacher used to be a soldier. My mom's a nurse, you know? So what are your folks do? He said, Oh, my father is the Deputy Prime Minister of Jordan. I said, Oh, I guess your mom's just chilling. Right. You know, my mood core partner, McGee, Kohl's man, a white boy from Stanford, you know? Yeah. I see what your parents are saying. My mom, my dad's a teacher. I'm the nurse. What do your folks do? He said, well, my dad owns three Swiss banks. I was like, well, my dad just got rejected from a bank loan in Brooklyn. We can talk about banking. We got something in common. You know what I'm saying? So, so I oftentimes felt like out of place. And it took that, that whole thing of imposter syndrome. I was still struggling with of not feeling like I don't belong. And I've since come to learn, you know, more than I understood at that point that we are not imposters. Like all of this is built on our backs. You know, all of this is built from the blood, sweat and tears that we put in. Our ancestors put in. And so we are right where we need to be in this moment. We've earned the opportunity to be in this place collectively and individually. And I would tell myself back then shake it off, steer the course, because this is exactly the point in time, the place in time, where you are supposed to be, and you should not allow. And I say that to all the students listening, right? You are where you are for a reason. There is a reason you are where you are, make the most of it. Don't let anybody tell you or make you think, you know, you don't need to be there. You don't deserve to be there. What you make of this opportunity, what you make of every opportunity before you is entirely up to you and entirely, you know, at your discretion to actually move yourself individually and collectively forward my family, we, we cherish the saying Ubuntu "We are in and so I am, I am in and so we are. There is no individual without the community. There's no community without the individual." And so I understand that more than I did back then, but that's what I would say to myself.

Dr. Todd Craig (01:16:27):
And such a powerful note for us to close on. Um, first and foremost, uh, Bryonn, I just want to thank you for being here with us in this conversation, um, to sharing
your work with us on Black Solidarity Day. Uh, I want to thank the New York City College of Technology community, a special, special thanks to AFR African-American Studies. Uh, Dr. Marta Effinger, who is the chair of the department. I also want to thank, Briody Blake, who is steering the department, um, in his administrative duties during a pandemic. Um, thank you brother, for all the good work that you do. I would be remiss if I didn't shout out Black New York, that's my class. I have to shout out all my students all y'all. Um, I hope y'all are watching and continue to do that. Good work. Um, remember that Queens is the best borough. Not Brooklyn. We get in trouble for that, but we have to say that and listen, I want everyone to continue to stay safe, continue to wear a mask, um, continue to wear a mask. Don't don't get fooled at anything else. And if there was one thing that you take away from this conversation that we are having, um, in the spirit of Black Solidarity Day, make sure that you get out and vote, whatever you do. Take that responsibility. Take that privilege that you have that many of our ancestors, blood, sweat, and tears, they gave the opportunity for you to be able to go and vote. So that in a moment like this, one of the most important elections of our time, you could be able to have your voice be heard on it is critical. Um, and, and we are in a place that we have never been in before. I don't think I've ever seen it. Bryonn, have you ever seen anything like this?

Dr. Bryonn Bain (01:18:26):
This is unprecedented.

Dr. Todd Craig (01:18:27):
So please, please make sure you go out and vote. Um, and with that, uh, we are going to salute all of y'all and have a wonderful Black Solidarity Day go vote. My name is dr. Todd Craig. We will see you on the next go round and make sure that you go and check out all of Bryonn Bain's work. You can definitely go and see him online in his main hub at "Lyrics from Lockdown" and that's www.lyricsfromlockdown.com. Check the brother out. Exciting, exciting, incredible work. Bryonn, tThank you again for being here with us, everyone else. Enjoy your day. Enjoy your time, vote. And we will see you when we see you be safe. Be well peace.

Dr. Bryonn Bain (01:19:21):
Peace.