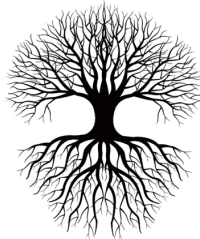


## derrika I. hunt

I'm grateful to submit to the Root Work Journal. The call, **Convening in the Ark: Black & Sacred Sites of Revelation**, felt like its own sort of requiem for love.

i am the daughter of sylvia renee. being my mothers daughter is my greatest accomplishment. i resist defining myself based on accolades society has told me are what give me value. i am valuable because i exist. i believe deeply in love.



## A Litany for Survival, A requiem for Love

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*I wrote the message below as a love letter, a litany for survival, and a requiem for love. Perhaps it is a bricolage of words trying to imagine what it means to convene in the ark, what it means to honor black and sacred sites of revelation. And so I wrote this kaleidoscope of words to fellow graduate students and colleagues during a time of deep crisis. I wrote this because many of us were and still are hurting as we expected the university, a place I have always been told was a site of refuge, to tend to our wounds. Instead, the university, this place that has been constructed as a place of healing, exacerbated already gaping wounds. It was in this crisis that I came to realize that the university is not what I always thought it was, but we, black women, can, and always do turn destruction into something beautiful. Convening in the Ark for me in this context, at this moment means writing as an act of revelation. In that sense, the university is a burial ground of sorts in the way it resembles the holding cell, and all the ways it reproduces the logics of death. I conjure all the ways my foremothers have reclaimed, reimagined, reconfigured, remade this space. I remember all the ways we have turned a burial ground into a garden. Here is a homage to the legacy of growing, cultivating, and making in the site of destruction. Here is a reminder to myself and others that the project of the university was never to love us, it was never designed to be the place for us to find the care and hope we are yearning for. But with our bare hands, we make bloom otherwise.*

Dear Graduate Students,

**I hope this message finds you well-- a sentiment I write these days though I know deep down many of us are hurting.** In fact, many of us are exhausted at this moment in time. Many of us came to the university, to graduate school in particular, with hopes and dreams toward futurity. We once believed that education could save us. But I have watched that hope slowly dwindle as we come to realize that the very "education" we thought could save us might be the very thing that is killing us. (pause for a moment of silence) Many of us have lost so much in the process. Conjuring Michael J. Dumas, I remember, "Schooling is not merely a site of suffering, but I believe it is the suffering that we have been least willing or able to acknowledge or give voice to..." (Dumas). Yet we continue on as best we can. This current moment of the COVID-19 pandemic reveals gaping wounds that have been in dire need of care for a long time. For many of us, this is a frightening, uncertain, unprecedented moment in time. And for some of us, this feels reminiscent of the multiple crises we've had to live through as marginalized people navigating the uneasy minefields of a settler-colonial, anti-black

world that often demands our demise. We are familiar with the calculated risks of living in a world that disregards our very being. We know that our very lives are always in crisis. We know that at the hands of a capitalist machine we are and always have been deemed expendable, the university too is part of the capitalist machine. But it is here at this crossroads, at this intersection of our various politics of location that I urge us to come together as a student community because we are not expendable. I summon us to form “a politic born out of necessity,” as Cherrie Moraga teaches us. This crossroads emerge as a juncture for us to decide which way to go. Will we infuse the space of the university with the love we need or will we abandon that project altogether and imagine some otherwise? I offer this letter as a meditation at the crossroads. I offer it as a convening in the ark to tell the story of the suffering and to make space to imagine the possibility of the healing.

I am writing to you from the homelands of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida. I am truly grateful that I am allowed to be a visitor in this place at this time. I am writing to you, fellow students, because after a disheartening departmental meeting at my own university yesterday, I felt moved to adhere to Isabelle Allende’s urging to “write what should not be forgotten.” To say the least, I am disheartened that universities and academic departments are still not adequately supporting students, particularly black and brown students. I am deeply hurt because our labor, our time, our care is what sustains so much of the function of the university. I have watched the most vulnerable of us be completely inundated with trying to survive and devoting time to our work, while the university thrived off of our underpaid labor while refusing to offer us adequate support to meet even our basic needs. It is even more so heartbreaking that during this time of crisis many of us feel like we have been abandoned by a place we have devoted so much of our time. I am sad that the university can’t seem to imagine our lives, our livelihoods as more valuable than it’s perceived profits. I am heartbroken because I am a student at a university, a multimillion dollar institution, that refuses to acknowledge how it positions students as collateral damage. I am heartbroken because the university refuses to accept that human beings are not capital and that the most vulnerable among us are not dead weight. I find myself arranging and rearranging words on this page in order to craft what I imagine to be possible. I only hope this letter can be a starting point for us to build power as a community. In this coming together, my desire is that we bring love as the compass to guide us forward.

So I write to you from the shorelines, to invoke the words of the Lorde. “For those of us who live at the shoreline standing upon the constant edges of decision crucial and alone for those of us who cannot indulge the passing dreams of choice.” (Lorde) I offer this letter as a litany for our survival. I imagine a litany for survival to be a yearning toward our communal desires for a more possible future. While in this uncertain moment there are no guarantees, I believe that our willingness to dream in the face of destruction is audacious and felt. As we dream and as we boldly proclaim survival, we are setting up, as Toni Cade Bambara says, “electric fields.” Bambara goes on to say “Words are to be taken seriously. I try to take seriously acts of language. Words set things in motion. I’ve seen them doing it. Words set up atmospheres, electrical fields, charges.” If Bambara’s declarations are true, then with words we can form new worlds. I invoke words like possibility, love, joy, healing, and sustenance with the hope of setting things in motion. I audaciously conjure these words in the face of the precarity lurking all around us. This assemblage of words is an offering, a leaning toward something more, something beyond, something possible. This is what it means to convene in the ark, this, this letter, this assemblage is a black and sacred site of revelation.

I write to you with a heart toward futurity. Our dreams and imaginations matter. I write with a clear refusal to adhere to the logic that we cannot dream of what can be because it has never been. I write with a clear refusal that we will not settle for the present as the benchmark from which we can begin to imagine a future. I invite you to dream with me because our survival depends on it. Though the university has abandoned us, perhaps it is in this moment of chaos that we can reimagine it. Perhaps it is in the wake of this destruction that we can re-tool the university as a site of love. These questions are lingering as I think about what it means to bring love to the center: What is the potential of the university? Can it be redeemed (something my dear friend Sara Lorraine Chase has asked many times) and reimaged as a place of possibility? How can we make and unmake this place to be a site of life-making and freedom-dreaming?

I do not have the answers but what I do have is words. Words are portals to some other future and as I piece these words together I invite you to this portal of some other possible. So, I turned to what I know best, the in-sights of my foremothers who have taught me how to dream like oppression isn't killing me. Sandra Cisneros said it best, "We do this because the world we live in is a house on fire and the people we love are burning." I understand now more than ever what those words mean in the face of a global crisis. These words illuminate that as COVID-19 sweeps the world, it, like so many other terrors, unevenly shapes and impacts the lives of all of us. We can see by looking from the bottom up that the most vulnerable of us might be left to die. After all, that is the legacy of this country. That is a peculiar and terrifying truth to come to terms with. Toni Morrison urges that it is our responsibility, to tell the truth. And the truth is that we need each other now more than ever. The university will certainly abandon us, but we can and will care for each other. We can and will dream toward a futurity that holds both love and education. A collective coming together is urgent because, as Gwendolyn Brooks declares, "We are each other's harvest; we are each other's business; we are each other's magnitude and bond." I invite you all to respond to this letter with words, affirmations, encouragement, care, difference, frustrations, and anything you deem to be necessary. I am here at the shoreline waiting for you.

Written with the most love I can conjure in the crevices of my broken heart,  
derrika I. hunt, the daughter of Sylvia Renee.

*"I love the word survival, it always sounds to me like a promise." - Audre Lorde 87*