

The times we live in are troubled. We continue to struggle with war, violence, racism, and the catastrophes that society imposes upon itself. Furthermore, we face the legacies of power that have liberated many, while discarding so many others. As scholars of communication, many of us have provided nuanced ways of understanding how these legacies came to be and how they are perpetuated in discourse, culture, politics, media, and technology. Today, I look beyond the historical ambivalences that bind freedom to destruction to better understand how personal acts of expression can change one's lived reality. My goal is to highlight the myriad creative ways that individuals perform beyond the limits historically imposed upon them in order to enact a lived sense of freedom.

Thus, this year's Caroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture is entitled "Performing Freedom in Troubled Times." My aim is to celebrate the central role that performance plays in concepts of freedom, especially for so many Black people who have sought ways to communicate what freedom means, and how it might be realized, despite living under conditions of contradiction, compromise, and contingency. Put simply, Black expressive culture is often performed to achieve sovereignty of body and mind in a world made to deny Black sovereignty. It is performed by seeing freedom, hearing freedom, singing freedom, and inhabiting freedom in the stories of the people that I will describe. Such performances serve as beacons of hope, resilience, and joy for those who have faced centuries of oppression, discrimination, and the denial of basic human rights. My lecture looks at performance not only as a form of expression, but also as a heuristic for rethinking what freedom means when faced with struggle and the interdependency of others. Performing freedom mingles the past with the present, inside with outside, and self with other. I argue that we must think of freedom *intimately* as something more than a socially structuring concept, but rather as something performed in ordinary life to bring out the feeling of new, perhaps even impossible realities. "Performing freedom" encapsulates the central question of my lecture: how do Black people navigate the tension between performance as resistance and performance *beyond* resistance in their struggle to "get free?"