

CARROLL C. ARNOLD DISTINGUISHED LECTURE 2021

Intentional Transformation

IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE

TINA M. HARRIS, LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY





ON OCTOBER 8, 1994, the Administrative Committee of the National Communication Association established the Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture. The Arnold Lecture is given in plenary session each year at the annual convention of the Association and features the most accomplished researchers in the field. The topic of the lecture changes annually so as to capture the wide range of research being conducted in the field and to demonstrate the relevance of that work to society at large.

The purpose of the Arnold Lecture is to inspire not by words but by intellectual deeds. Its goal is to make the members of the Association better informed by having one of its best professionals think aloud in their presence. Over the years, the Arnold Lecture will serve as a scholarly stimulus for new ideas and new ways of approaching those ideas. The inaugural Lecture was given on November 17, 1995.

The Arnold Lecturer is chosen each year by the First Vice President. When choosing the Arnold Lecturer, the First Vice President is charged to select a long-standing member of NCA, a scholar of undisputed merit who has already been recognized as such, a person whose recent research is as vital and suggestive as their earlier work, and a researcher whose work meets or exceeds the scholarly standards of the academy generally.

The Lecture has been named for Carroll C. Arnold, the late Professor Emeritus of Pennsylvania State University. Trained under Professor A. Craig Baird at the University of Iowa, Arnold was the coauthor (with John Wilson) of *Public Speaking as a Liberal Art*, author of *Criticism of Oral Rhetoric* (among other works), and co-editor of *The Handbook of Rhetorical and Communication Theory*. Although primarily trained as a humanist, Arnold was nonetheless one of the most active participants in the New Orleans Conference of 1968 which helped put social scientific research in communication on solid footing. Thereafter, Arnold edited *Communication Monographs* because of a fascination with empirical questions. As one of the three founders of the journal *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Arnold also helped move the field toward increased dialogue with the humanities in general. For these reasons and more, Arnold was dubbed "The Teacher of the Field" upon retirement from Penn State in 1977. Dr. Arnold died in January of 1997.

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NATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION
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Dr. Harris was recently elected as 2nd Vice President of the Southern States Communication Association SSCA (2020-2025) and has received the Francine Merritt Award and the Robert J. Kibler Memorial Award.



Intentional Transformation

IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE

I AM TRULY HUMBLED THAT OUR 1ST VICE PRESIDENT, Dr. Roseann Mandziuk, has chosen me for such an honor. I hope that the words I share with you today will inspire you to embrace the spirit of this lecture, titled “Intentional Transformation in the Midst of Change.”

Before I begin my actual speech, I want to pause and thank many people who are special to me and have been integral to who I am and where I am at this very moment in time. My mother, Pastor Mamie J. Smith, my father, the late Rev. Joseph Harris, my mother’s husband, Dwayne Smith, and my siblings, Greg Harris (and his wife Theresa), Sonya Harris, and Ken Harris have all been on this journey with me from day one. The same is true for my god sisters, best girlfriends, and sister-scholars and brother-scholars who have stood by me as well. I won’t name everyone, as I am sure my nerves will get in the way, and I will inadvertently miss someone. This helps me avoid having to use the old Southern saying, “Charge it to my head and not my heart.” Individually and collectively, they have helped me get to where I am today. Thus, thank you all for your love and unwavering support.

I was immediately struck by surprise, awe, and honor when Dr. Mandziuk asked me to give the Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture. Shortly afterward, my heart sank, and I thought, “Oh my God. What have I gotten myself into?! What could I possibly say that anyone would want to hear??” Those feelings of uncertainty and anxiety quickly subsided, as I was reminded why I was invited to give such an important lecture at such a time as this. My comfort and excitement continued to build as the NCA office asked me to provide the title of my lecture. The title—“Intentional Transformation in the Midst of Change”—seemed to capture the spirit of the last year for me, the country, and the world. It resonated with me on so many levels. Today, my hope is that my talk will offer us all hope and strength during what have been some incredibly bleak and trying times. More importantly, I hope that we as academicians and citizens will seize the day and choose to be agents of transformation in every space that we occupy.

The spring and summer of 2020 introduced us to a tumultuous time as a country and world. We were in the early stages of a health pandemic, followed closely by a racial pandemic. COVID-19 was running rampant throughout the world, and racial injustices in the U.S. relative to police brutality and death reached an all-time high. The dual health pandemics were placing us all in a very precarious state. Underlying conditions and exposure to this invisible boogeyman had everyone on edge because we had no idea of where it had originated, how it was contracted, or how to avoid catching it with 100% certainty. The health pandemic was further exacerbated by racial disparities. Who was most affected and at greater risk of dying became abundantly clear as the death toll continued to rise. There was also an unprecedented increase in the number of hate crimes against Asian American and Pacific Islanders. They were victims of a morass of hate that had been stewing for years, decades even, and was now boiling over. They were caught up in a torrent of racial epithets too crude to repeat. Xenophobic slurs flowed like rivers, engulfing our Asian American and Pacific Islander sisters and brothers, drowning them in unfettered aversion that, sadly, had reached new heights. The racial pandemic was equally traumatic because it was a reminder of the

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horrors of systemic racism that have been woven into the very fabric of the United States. Indeed, there are many good things about being a U.S. citizen; however, it would be foolish to ignore our sordid past and its impact on every facet of who and what we are as a country.

These dual pandemics have taught us many things, one of the greater lessons being to prioritize being intentional in our response to change. I must believe that we all have been forced to recalibrate, reevaluate, and reorganize how we are engaging with life in both our professional and private spheres. One way many have chosen to describe this response is “to pivot,” which is a word I personally believe has been overused and misused and has worn out its welcome. Reflecting on the ways that people chose to respond is more reflective of what I am calling “intentional transformation.”

The word “intentional” first resonated with me when I was on an ICA panel with amazing women scholars from diverse racial, ethnic, ideological, and methodological backgrounds. We collectively paused while discussing the conference theme of “Engaging the Essential Work of Care.” We focused on care that prioritizes amplifying marginalized voices and experiences, and how we “cultivate and activate care” as scholars and people. Eventually, “intentional” became our buzzword; we all seemed to agree that we have either always believed or have come to the realization that all of our actions are intentional. That they *should* be intentional. **The urgency of being intentional was underscored by both pandemics. They reminded us of how or taught us that everything that we do, be it for work or pleasure, must be driven by a purpose.** There must be a greater purpose behind our choices. Moreover, those choices lead to outcomes that should lead to some type of transformation. This was the breath of fresh air and hope I did not know I needed. This was when, for me, the phrase “intentional transformation” was born.

I am sure I am not alone when I say that I vacillated along an emotional continuum as I attempted to come to grips with our new reality. I was struck by the need to make sure everything counted and had purpose. There were three areas within which people (and I) seemed to become intentional: our physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing. At the beginning of the pandemic, I found myself snacking more than usual, giving in to little indulgences, only for them to hold my waistline hostage and force me to get on a self-designed fitness program. I am still struggling with that. My emotional wellbeing was at risk because of the toll that everything was taking on me, not just in 2020 but across my lifetime. My mental wellbeing was being taxed as well. In addition to trying to process the gravity of everything that was going on, I was also trying to remain focused on my professional responsibilities and commitments. Trying to manage and balance all three has been certainly difficult; however, while my experiences with each are not by any means unique, they are unique to me. These three areas were spaces where we all seemed to direct our attention and make concerted efforts to respond in healthier and more effective ways. Frankly, we were all becoming more intentional and strategic in how we approached these areas of our lives, no longer taking them for granted.

An underlying theme of the disrupted professional normalcy grounding my lecture is the increased attention given to the impostor syndrome label that surfaced in popular discourse during the dual pandemics. Whether it was in response to a continued devaluation of Black, Brown, Yellow, female, non-binary, or LGBTIQIA+ bodies, or a general insecurity about one’s professional and intellectual prowess, many historically marginalized people seized the opportunity to reclaim our worth and value despite societal misconceptions of who we are. This phenomenon is what I am calling “internalized identity validation.” Internalized identity validation is “the act of unabashedly accepting and embracing one’s skills, talents, and excellence despite efforts to trivialize and devalue them in systemically oppressive spaces.” The pandemics reminded us, and continue to remind us, that we are valuable beyond the work

that we do. We are also valuable *because* of the work we do; it's transformative and has great potential to change the world. We have worked very hard to be here and have earned our seat at the proverbial table. There is room for everyone; we just need a bigger table. Our intentionality placed many of us in the unique position of shedding this false ideology and embracing all of our "magic." We did, and do, deserve to be in the places and spaces we occupy, and we should never forget that. This is the true meaning of internalized identity validation.

By extension, intentional transformation works in concert with internalized identity validation in that we must understand first who we are before we can help others come to that same realization for themselves. **Intentional transformation** is what I am defining as **purposeful change that leads to better versions of ourselves for the benefit of others**. Again, intentional transformation refers to "purposeful change that leads to better versions of ourselves for the benefit of others." The idea of intentional transformation is reflective of a personal mantra I have held close for a lifetime. I have always made it a point to make sure that every interaction, connection, and relationship I have with others has a purpose. I believe that the purpose of these interpersonal exchanges goes beyond being transactional. These exchanges are driven by a desire and commitment to contribute to helping someone else reach their full potential along their journey in life, wherever it may take them. If I cannot be of help to them for *whatever* reason, then I will surely step aside. This approach to life has now morphed into intentional transformation, both for others and for me. I try to be very purposeful in everything that I do professionally and personally. I have perfected neither, as I am still a work in progress.

Since that ICA conference, I have paused every single day to ask myself in one way or another how the scholarship that I am producing is making a difference in the world. I have learned do to this through the fatigue we have endured since December 2019, the month when COVID-19 was slowly ravaging the world. The life of an academic is a complex yet essential one if we are to be a world full of critical thinkers. We dedicate our lives, *per se*, to teaching, doing research, and engaging in service that in some small way will effectively change the world. To be that catalyst for change, we must commit to being intentional—to acting "on purpose" and for a greater good. Even in those moments when the fatigue is overwhelming, when we are vulnerable and weary, we must find the resolve to press on in our fight for justice, truths—with a small "t"—and understanding. We must remain committed to "RENEWAL AND TRANSFORMATION."

Being the qualitative scholar that I am, I decided to conduct a thematic analysis of what I am calling macro- and micro-moments that have occurred throughout my career that inform my position on "Intentional Transformation in the Midst of Change." These moments have stood out for various reasons, the main one being that they were exemplars of events that could have easily derailed me from my path and my purpose. I did not always recognize it at the time, but as the saying goes, "Hindsight is 20/20."

Self-reflexivity has led me to four observations I hope will inspire and encourage each one of us here today to stay the course and be the agent of change we hope to see through the work we have committed ourselves to doing. Regardless of our status, methodology, or theoretical leanings, we all have important and valuable contributions to make to the Communication discipline, whether it be through our teaching, research, or service, or all three. If 2020 has taught us anything, it has been that we must look outside of ourselves and recognize those moments and opportunities when we can give back. More importantly, we should become comfortable prioritizing ourselves in a healthy way so that we can fulfill our purpose and what that entails. Thus, we must commit ourselves to intentional transformation in every aspect of our lives and in who we are as people within and outside of academe. **Intentional transformation can be achieved if we do the following: (1) "Do not grow weary in well doing," (2) Remain intentional in everything that you do, (3) Recognize and manifest the power within, and (4) Lift as you climb.**

Before I expound upon these four actionables, I want to contextualize them by sharing two of countless experiences I have had along my journey that have been pivotal in helping me retain my resolve as a critical thinker and scholar, and more importantly as a Black woman in a world riddled with systemic oppressions. These two experiences are emblazoned in my memory and my heart. The first occurred in high school. I vividly remember anxiously waiting in

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my seat as our English teacher canvassed the room to return our papers. The assignment was to write an original murder mystery. I remember taking pen to paper as I crafted an intricate story; one of my proudest to date. As I sat in the classroom, I was excited to get back my paper because I knew it was really, really good. I just *knew it!* I was shocked when the teacher asked me to step out into the hallway. Naïve me thought she was taking me out of the classroom to commend me for my amazing work. Instead, she accused me of plagiarism, point blank asking me where I copied my story from. I was in shock that she thought I wasn't good enough or smart enough to write something so well. I was sickened that my integrity and blackness were simultaneously being questioned. She held my paper hostage for another week, and while I waited anxiously and patiently, I remained troubled that she had reduced me to a stereotype. I became even more troubled when I finally got my paper back and saw that, after what seemed like an eternity, she assigned me a grade of A-. If she thought the work was so great, then why give me a minus? We all know why. We all know why.

The second experience of note occurred several years later in my first semester of my master's program. That was the toughest semester of my graduate career because I was getting acclimated to this whole new world I would eventually come to love. I worked hard that semester and tried desperately to grasp the concepts and theories that were incredibly abstract. By semester's end, I was glad to have made it through. I was glad to have done well enough to have survived. My relief, excitement, and pride were cut short when I received a handwritten letter from one of my professors. Again, being naïve, I thought she was taking time to applaud me for making it through my first semester. I remember opening the envelope and seeing her beautiful penmanship. I immediately thought, "Wow. She took the time out of her schedule to write me. This *has* to be a letter of support." Instead, it was a scathing, three-page letter of condemnation—in pink ink, I might add—telling me in no uncertain terms that I in no way belonged in graduate school. Every curve of her letters, the dot of an "i" and the cross of a "t," dripped with metaphorical blood ripping at my soul. She attacked my very being, the core of who I was and who I was to become. I never shared with the faculty what she had done. I suppressed this horrific encounter because I knew it would not define me. It would only propel me to my destiny. Fast forward 15 years. Imagine the irony when I was approached by this same person, at NCA no less, and invited to apply for a faculty position at her university. As she attempted to engage me in idle chitchat, I made it my goal to keep this interaction short and empty. We had nothing to talk about. I was also having flashbacks to the letter that she had written to me so many years ago. She clearly had selective amnesia and the gall to now see my worth. I declined the invitation and quickly shut down our interaction. I left the encounter at peace, beyond confident in who I am. I never needed her validation. I tucked away her letter into the recesses of my mind, never to return. I don't remember what I did with the letter, but in hindsight, I am glad I did not keep it. The totality of this encounter reminded me that I should never, under any circumstances, let anyone else determine my destiny. More importantly, I should never, ever, ever let anyone derail me from the path for which I am destined. And neither should you.

While my story is not yours and yours is not mine, it is a testament to our resilience, our ability to survive difficult circumstances. The summer of 2020 reminded me that there is a greater purpose in the work we have been called to do; hence the four actionables previously mentioned. As a refresher, they are (1) "Do not grow weary in well doing," (2) Remain intentional in everything that you do, (3) Recognize and manifest the power within, and (4) Lift as you climb. Individually and collectively, these actionables contribute to intentional transformation on both the individual and

communal level. They function together to create intellectual communities that produce deliverables with practical implications for spaces and places outside of the ivory tower. In short, our work should move us “from theory to practice.” Our scholarship should be transformative and be of some direct benefit to others. Yes, it can be cathartic if we use our intellectual capacities for personal healing or intellectual growth. A greater goal should be to identify the ways we can use our research to change the world and the various spaces that we occupy. Towards that end, we should commit ourselves to digging deeper and doing what the late statesman and civil rights activist John Lewis called us to do: “Get in good trouble.”

“Don’t grow weary in well doing,” the first actionable, is something I have heard all my life. As a preacher’s kid twice over, it was a scripture meant to encourage us to stay in the fight even when things get tough. I don’t know about you, but I have been in enough fights—thankfully, not physical ones—to last me a lifetime. Those fights have taken many forms, such as slights in the grocery store, racial microaggressions in the classroom, interpersonal infractions from colleagues, being excluded (intentionally or not) from lunches, and so many more. They have weighed quite heavily on me, just as yours have on you. They left mental and emotional scars as reminders of what I have gone through. While I occasionally revisit those micro- and macro-moments, I recognize that the bigger lesson of staying the course is not just for my benefit, but also for that of others.

In our profession, it is very easy for us to be siloed by others or to place ourselves in silos as we write our manuscripts or study for classes. That is the very nature of much of the work that we do. We are holed up in our home and university offices producing deliverables, such as journal articles, books, and book chapters, hoping that our work will reach audiences who will “get” us and appreciate the arguments we are advancing or the phenomena we are unveiling. This intellectual work can be exhausting to our minds, bodies, and spirits, especially when coupled with our teaching responsibilities, our service to our institutions and the discipline, and the mentoring and social support we provide to others.

We can be depleted by the very things to which we commit ourselves, which is why we need to prioritize intentional transformation. This requires that we take a step back and recalibrate on a regular basis. How can we be of help to others if we are not taking care of ourselves? How can we get into “good trouble” if we are too exhausted or overwhelmed? We need a reminder that transforming our discipline into one that is healthy and robust requires commitment and dedication by us all. This means that we actively work to break the cycle of toxicity with our students and colleagues, offering words of kindness and hope as we mentor and guide. This means getting in “good trouble.”

The second actionable is “being intentional in everything we do.” This means being deliberative and thoughtful about everything to which we choose to commit ourselves. When we decide to take on service roles or research projects, we have different motivations for assuming these additional roles and responsibilities. Some do it to stroke the ego because they want to be helpful, to satisfy the “checkmark” on an annual review or promotion case, or because it is hard to say no. Whatever the motivation, it is vital to our well-being as people that we be more judicious regarding the things that we commit to doing. Frankly, I am preaching to the choir when I say this. In theory, we can probably all agree that, if we commit to doing something, then it is intentional. We *intend* to do that which we have promised. Summer 2020 showed us that our responsibilities can be overwhelming for us, and probably have been for some time. Factor in the stressors associated with the dual pandemics, and those responsibilities take on new meaning. We must now recalibrate and prioritize those things that are meaningful and of value.

Twenty-twenty taught me that I really need to give considerable thought to that which I have been asked to do or am expected to do. **This means being intentional in the tasks I am willing to take on and the relationships I am choosing to form.** In other words, this actionable is referring to learning when to say “no.” As a Black woman, I am taxed with an inordinate number of service requests that I agree to do, and, unfortunately, it is to my detriment in that I run myself ragged, much like many of you. Working until we are fatigued and overextending ourselves is not the answer, and it certainly is not a badge of honor. Thus, we must do as Congresswoman Maxine Waters famously said: reclaim our time. Reclaiming our time requires prioritizing our responsibilities while also doing things that allow

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us to disconnect, recalibrate, and recharge. Additionally, we need to be committed to showing ourselves and others grace, being more forgiving. After all, we are only human and can only do so much, which means we need to avoid situations where we are at risk of overextending ourselves. Doing so will also serve as an example to others who are trying to navigate these very ambiguous spaces we occupy and share. They will learn the value of prioritizing self and others in a profession and world where humanity is oftentimes taken for granted. Thus, adopting these behaviors will alter our intellectual and emotional landscapes, helping us produce scholarship that extends beyond the four walls of the proverbial ivory tower. We have very likely recalibrated and given considerable thought to the meaning of life and our role in it. The two pandemics have taught us that this is a time for renewal and transformation.

The third actionable is **“recognize and manifest the power within,”** which requires that we **acknowledge, appreciate, and bring to life the skills and talents that reside within us.** All of our lives, we are socialized to follow the path that others believed is best for us. During our formative years, some of these people include parents, teachers, and older relatives with lived experiences and wisdom that can help us reach our full potential. They see talents and strengths within us that we probably do not realize we have. This was the case with my mother, who saw something in me and strongly encouraged me to apply to college after I graduated from high school. The vision I had for my future was different. I don’t even think it was a future. At minimum, it was “next steps,” and I was not clear on where they would ultimately lead me. Thankfully, my mother saw so much more in me, and she pushed me. I had others in higher ed who ushered me along the way and through my various degrees. They offered me the support and encouragement that I did not always know I needed. These mentors and allies also provided fertile ground that allowed me to truly recognize this power within—my gift as a critical thinker and writer—and to be confident in that, regardless of the many obstacles that came and continue to raise their ugly heads.

We all have experienced micro-moments throughout our lives that could have derailed us, but thankfully we are still standing and are here to tell our truths. Those moments should be life lessons that inspire us to be better, do better, and become who we are destined to be. Realizing and manifesting that power within means seeking and determining those opportunities and relationships that will take us to the next level. Granted, it does benefit us to network, connecting with people who can be instrumental in our advancement access; however, we must do so with caution and discretion. It is important to avoid appearances and acts of being exploitive at all costs.

Academe is much like other professions in that it is a culture to which we all must adapt. For example, there are considerable differences between an undergraduate student and a graduate student. Each has different expectations, and the only way to navigate either path is through trial and error and experience. Oftentimes, there is someone more senior who can help guide you through the process through informal and formal mentoring. The same is said for junior and senior faculty. In all these scenarios, there are cultural norms and expectations we are expected to ascribe to. Depending on our confidence level, self-esteem, and support network, we might doubt our worth along the way, which is expected. We are completing a number of “firsts” and want to perform well. It is par for the course; however, this process is sometimes tainted by people who erect rites of passages akin to hazing... all to weed out the “undesirables,” which are typically the historically marginalized. The proverbial other. This is not to say that this is true of all universities and colleges; however, there are public and private narratives that confirm this truth.

If we all take a moment to reflect on our own journeys up to this point in our careers, I am sure we can identify several micro-moments where a person or people actively attempted to thwart our progress for whatever reason. These experiences are a testament to everyone's character. They reveal who you are or who you can become under pressure, like a diamond in the rough, at least for the target. For the perpetrator, these behaviors reveal their weaknesses and insecurities. Their cracks are beginning to show. For the target, this is a proclamation—though from an unlikely and unwanted source—of their present and future worth. The target gains further clarity of who they are because they have a better understanding of who they are as a person of integrity. They are unapologetically themselves. They are stronger, wiser, and better for those micro-moments.

To be clear, our micro-moments do have the potential to destroy the human spirit; however, we must make it our priority to never let someone else's toxicity or negativity define who we are. They only have power over us if we yield it to them. Never, ever, ever give them your power. Be intentional: rest in your confidence, your truth, your power, and your magic. Never let anyone steal your shine. Do the same for those you teach and mentor. Passing on a legacy of affirmation and encouraging internalized identify validation will ultimately break the cycle of toxicity that has become all too common in the ivory tower.

The fourth and final actionable is "lift as you climb." This phrase is something we have all heard before. It originated with social activist Mary Church Terrell, who, in 1896, founded the National Association of Colored Women, and the organization used it as its motto. The phrase means that a person, as a leader, intentionally provides support and nurturance to others, thus making their growth and success a priority. While this might sound self-serving or narcissistic, it is the exact opposite. Engaging in these kinds of behaviors requires the investment of emotional and mental labor that people oftentimes do not have. As leaders, we are more "seasoned" and well-versed in the industry, which should mean that we have the experience, wisdom, and expertise necessary to help our junior colleagues or scholars navigate academia. What is more important and essential is that we have the heart and sincerity for providing that lift to others as we travel along our own path. We must be willing to provide them, within reason, what we know they need while putting aside the self, expecting nothing in return.

I view this practice as my responsibility as a leader. It is something that I have done for as long as I can remember. It is an aspect of mentoring that, while necessary, brings me great joy and pain. But again, it is not about me, and I will explain in moment. My joy comes from seeing the faces of mentees or colleagues when they have an "aha moment" or realization that they are on the right track or love what they do. I am serving as a doula, someone who is trained to help someone give birth to their goals and dreams. There is nothing more exciting than seeing the pure excitement on a student's or colleague's face when they realize the invalidity and emptiness of the words the naysayers and haters spoke about them who made them stumble along the way. I choose to speak life over people, offer them hope and encouragement rather than attack their self-esteem or belittle them in any way. I believe that is what a good mentor does. At the very least, that is what a good *person* does.

I firmly believe the saying, "People come in your life for a reason, a season, or a lifetime." It typically applies to friendships and can certainly be used to categorize our professional relationships. This categorization process, if used properly, can help us achieve the fourth actionable of lifting as we climb. To do so, we must put aside ego so that we do not override or overshadow the needs of the more junior person. This does not mean that we let people take advantage of us, disrespect us, or act unprofessionally. Instead, we recognize our purpose in their lives and eventually determine or negotiate the boundaries and norms for those relationships. Each relationship is intentional and driven by the need for change to get them to the next level. We are lifting as we climb. We lift them by prioritizing their ambition of becoming a better scholar, theorist, methodologist, and critical thinker. We lift by supporting them if their future takes them outside of academe. We lift by helping them determine the next phase of their journey, whether they know what that might be or not. We are there to help them prepare for the birthing of their future self. As doulas, we stand by their side and help them care for the talents, the gifts that are growing inside of them and, if necessary, we help them see them to fruition.

Let us remember to prioritize intentional transformation in our response to the changes that will continue to come. Let us commit to internalized individual validation so that we can be better versions of ourselves.

Through the four actionables I have presented you with today, I hope that we all are inspired to be agents of change in the various spaces that we occupy. The dual pandemics have left us with many lessons and will surely teach us many more. Let us remember to prioritize intentional transformation in our response to the changes that will continue to come. Let us commit to internalized individual validation so that we can be better versions of ourselves.

Twenty-twenty has shown us the value of looking outside of ourselves and recognizing those moments and opportunities when we can give back. Toward that end, we must be comfortable prioritizing ourselves in a healthy way so that we can fulfill our purpose and help others along the way. All of these efforts require that we commit ourselves to intentional transformation in every aspect of our lives and in who we are as people within and outside of academe. Let us remember the actionables and hold them close to our hearts: (1) "Do not grow weary in well doing," (2) Remain intentional in everything that you do, (3) Recognize and manifest the power within, and (4) Lift as you climb.

Over the last 23 months, I have found myself regularly engaging in self-reflexivity and appreciating the work I have been doing for nearly 31 years. Interracial communication is my passion and, like many of you, I have reevaluated and thought about why we do what we do. One takeaway has been to preserve my longtime commitment to moving scholarship from theory to practice, which was cemented like never before. Countless emails, texts, and conversations with colleagues, friends, and past and present students about the racial unrest of 2020 produced all the evidence I needed to dig in deeper and continue doing what the late statesman and civil rights activist John Lewis called us to do: "Get in good trouble."

Getting in good trouble means different things to different people. For me, it means remaining in the fight against racism and other forms of oppression. We have all been called to fight a fight... a different fight. That is the beauty of the diversity of humanity: we can all do our part in our small corner of the world. My fight has been against racism because I am all too familiar with its material consequences in my personal and professional lives. My field of experience is very similar to that of others in this room and throughout the world, and I personally believe I would be remiss if I refused to "get in good trouble" doing the right thing. I certainly do not have the perfect roadmap, but I believe there are multiple ways to get there. I continue to find different routes to get there, which is very refreshing and inspiring. I encourage you to reflect on your own roadmaps and future destinations in the months and years to come. The routes are a smaller part of my larger path; they are also a form of renewal because they are a constant reminder that our work is never done. They inspire me to remain entrenched in the essential work that paves the way for true transformation in an ever-changing world. Moreover, I will spend the rest of my career doing my part in dismantling racism, one relationship at a time.

