

# CHAMELEON:

A SYLLABUS FOR SURVIVAL



JAAMIL OLAWALE KOSOKO

# FOREWORD: DESTINED TO ARRIVE

-ADAM PATTERSON

Kosoko's *Chameleon* came to me while the likes of Hurricane Dorian came to the Caribbean. I didn't have many words for what was happening; I could only find words wanting to make it stop. Kosoko's work in one eye with the other eye staring into the eye of the hurricane, *Chameleon* is a reminder that we don't have to stay where we are, as queered vulnerable bodies living precarious lives. Taking Turns with Hurricanes reflects on the fixating and stagnating social contracts imposed on the Caribbean region by global powers which render its lives and deaths meaningless in the ongoing queering of the climate and our hurricanes. Refusing to die meaninglessly in this hold, it insatiably asks what other connections, interdependencies and kinships can we want and strengthen with each other in this present we've been dealt. Like with *Chameleon*, it recognises the ongoing nature of this journey of transformations and turns, resonating with the movement and passage of hurricanes—never settling, destined to arrive somewhere—knowing full well the process may be painful and difficult while always seeking to return to love, even if it must be found in a hopeless place. The eye of the hurricane may provide “the occasion for self-reflection as well as for an exploration of terror, desire, fear, loathing, and longing” in the same way as Blackness has (Hartman, 1997). It gives us room to question our current inhabited orders, perhaps making way to slip, shift and keep on moving together onto more meaningful and disruptive lives.

You are held in the sombre swaying tempo of raspy cellos rocking you back and forth. Brown, black, gold; a shimmering milky skin encases the body in front of you as it tries to hatch itself into new life, new conditions, new pains, new pleasures. The unfolding of Jaamil Olawale Kosoko's *Chameleon* remarks, reflects on and rehearses the many holds that may confine or define the fugitive Black body; always on the move—on the run—changing its face, its posture, so as to live deliciously another day, another moment, another flicker of miraculous joy, Kosoko's performance embodies this metamorphic process in melanated satin. Rocking, trembling, stretching, writhing, the whiplashing ends of fabric coming undone signal this figure's transformation and arrival into a new form of Black life. Now untethered, warmed by the faint whisper of Luther Vandross' So Amazing, Kosoko's body moves in joy, feeling himself, getting familiar with this new posture. Vandross' voice echoing, “I hope you know I gladly go / anywhere you take me,” we are reminded that this journey of transformations, reconfigurations and turnings is ongoing; a continuous drift guided by the will to return to a flickering moment of love and joy.



# CHAMELEON: A SYLLABUS FOR SURVIVAL

-JAAMIL OLAWALE KOSOKO

"If you can't change reality, change your perceptions of it."  
- Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

"Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next."  
- Arundhati Roy, "The Pandemic is a Portal"

This is a moment for Radical Reimagining, for sharing and displaying performances of kinship, kindness, and care like we have never expressed before. Because of our collective grief, the dynamic number of intersectional realities converging on our ability to practice freedom, our basic need for human contact and connection hangs in a void of deep unknowing. We find ourselves in a particularly fragile space emotionally and physically. On one hand this pandemic is asking us to isolate, slow down, read, self-care, and breathe. On the other hand, we're being asked to practice a multi-tiered approach to community organizing and activism. We are being asked to transform and adapt.

What are the agreements, and complex systems of care needed to realize alternative methodologies for negotiating this moment of global crisis?

Is it even possible to create an invitation that portals us through such nascent space?

What are the emergent values of the new world inside which we are heading? What does it mean to educate or even create in a time of global crisis?

But of course, these are not new questions. For many poor, ill, Black, neurodiverse, Queer, Trans, Disabled, Indigenous, People of Color, + folx, we have been making work and realizing ourselves while negotiating crisis, pandemics and economic disinvestment our entire lives.

The inequities that have historically plagued our existence have, in fact, become more illuminated. Have there always been trillions of dollars hidden in vaults that could have been offering relief and support to the people all this time? Were reparations really so unfathomable a thought to realize inside the American Project? Now that we all must practice self-isolation and feel the pressure of confinement in and on our bodies, we also must consider prison justice reform. And as we approach what might be the greatest depression in modern history, we have to reconsider how we support the most vulnerable individuals so often left off the census, those on the fringe, born in the undercommons of the undercommons.

I feel incredibly grateful and honored to have had the opportunity for the past several years to share my thinking and strategies for performance-making all over the world. But more so than having had the ability, agency, and freedom to think publicly in the world, was having been given the trust of various educational institutions to create syllabi that are directly linked to my lived experience. These courses include "[The Transgressive Body](#)" and "[The Radical Imagination](#)."

This brings me to *Chameleon: A Syllabus for Survival*. Here, I share some of the readings, practices, and creative vectors that have, literally, taught me how to survive in a world where I was never meant to survive.

As we all move deeper into this new world and the possibility of the portals it generates, I hope this syllabus offers you as much healing as it has me and my students. Furthermore, I invite you to begin creating your own syllabus or bibliography for your life, for your family. Perhaps this will become a new kind of family album? What texts have saved your life? And by texts, I mean songs, rituals, potions, spells, memories, recipes, materials, objects, practices, communities, etc.

My goal is for this to be a living document. This project is not an end but a beginning, an invitation into an alternative way of working and thinking alongside each other, in community, to protect the future we all deserve.

Live click-able links are embedded throughout this SYLLABUS. Explore!



Chameleon (The Living Installments) meeting, Zoom Call, 2020





Marsha P. Johnson in Greenwich Village in 1988. After Graduating from high school in Elizabeth, N.J., she moved to New York with \$15 and a bag of clothes.



Drawing by Taz, Audience Member,  
Sent via Instagram, 2020



mayfield brooks, *Chameleon* (The Jo'burg Installments)  
Johannesburg, SA, 2019



Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, *Chameleon* (A Visual Album), EMPAC, 2019





Michelle Alexander  
*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2012)

James Baldwin  
*The Fire Next Time* (1992)

Pauline Boss  
*Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief* (1999)

Jericho Brown  
*The Tradition* (2019)

Adrienne Marie Brown  
*Emergent Strategy* (2017)

Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004)

Rudolph P. Byrd, *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde* (2009)



Original Artwork by Nile Harris

## Rethinking the Apocalypse: An Indigenous Anti-Futurist Manifesto

Rethinking the Apocalypse: An Indigenous Anti-Futurist Manifesto

First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (2015)

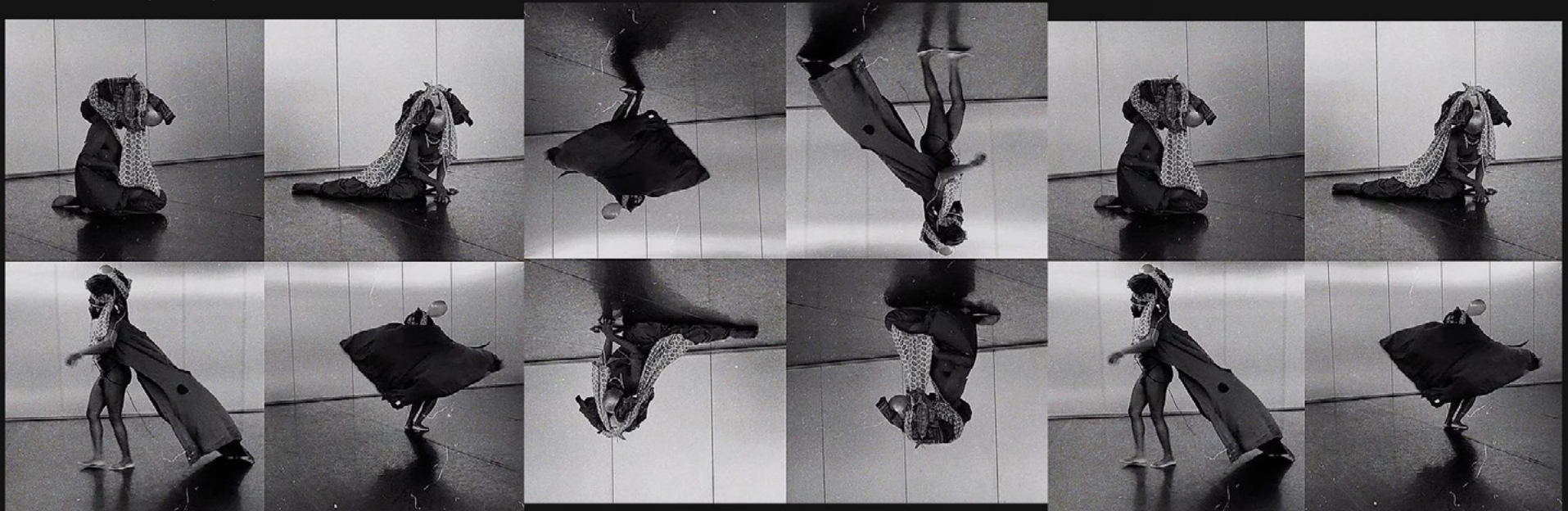
James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2013)

Configurations in Motion, *Performance Curation and Communities of Color* (2015)

Ashon T. Crawley, *The Lonely Letters* (2020)

Whitewalling: Aruna D'Souza and Nisa Mackie on Art, Race, and Protest

Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990)





'''we are the  
consequence of  
the history of  
the colonizer's  
future.'''

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Photo by Ludger Storcks, Ima Iduozee, *Chameleon*, Ponderosa, Lunow-Stolzenhagen, Germany, 2019

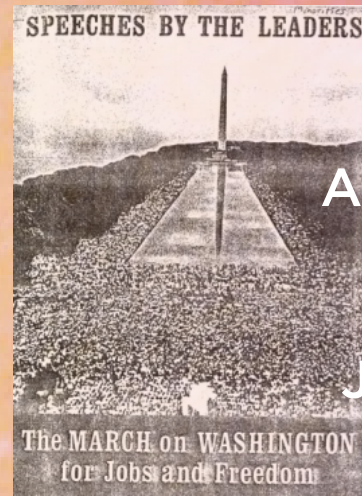




Photo by Zivanai Matangi, mayfield brooks, *Chameleon* (The Jo'burg Installments), Johannesburg, SA, 2019



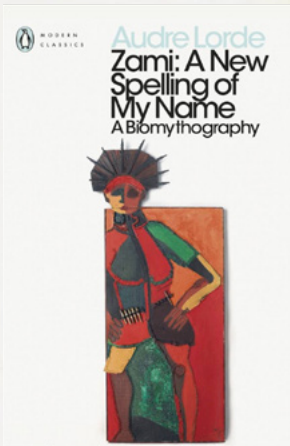
Photo by Nemo Stocklassa Hinders, Ima Iduozee & Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, *Chameleon* (The Stockholm Installments), Within Practice, Stockholm, SE, 2018



"I HAVE A DREAM," ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM

"We are the ones we have been waiting for."

-June Jordan



bell hooks, *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self Esteem* (2004)

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practice of Freedom* (1994)

bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004)

Philip Huang, *A Pornography of Grief* (2011)

Saeed Jones, *Prelude to Bruise* (2014)

June Jordan, *Poem for South African Women* (1980)

Audre Lorde, *ZAMI: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982)

Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power*

Cindy Milstein, *Rebellious Mourning: The Collective Work of Grief* (2017)

Fred Moten, Stefano Harney, *Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (2013)

Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003)

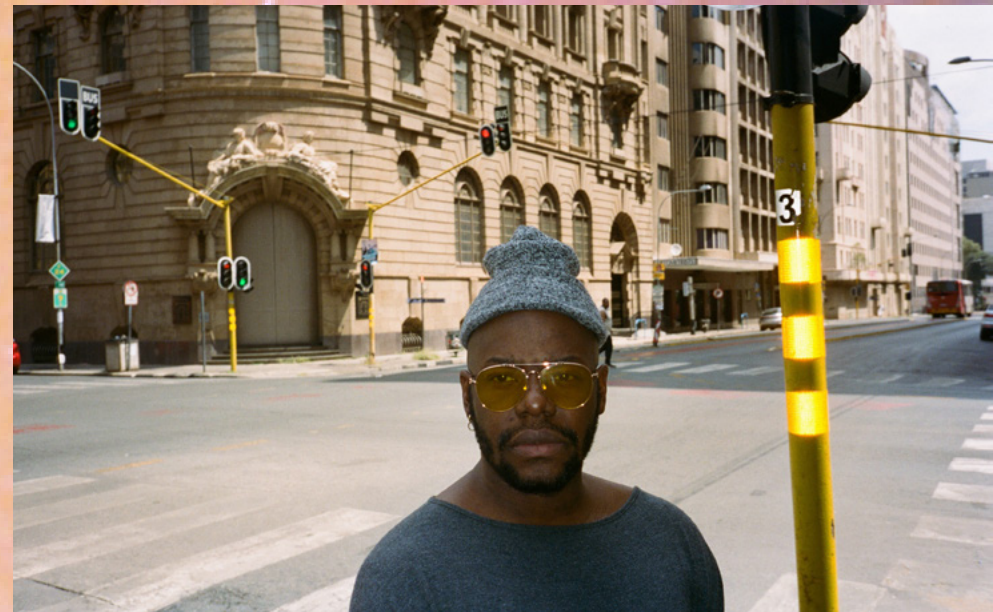


Photo by Ima Iduozee, Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, Johannesburg, SA, 2019

"The function of the erotic is to encourage excellence and to give us the strength to pursue it. But giving into the fear of feeling and working to capacity is a luxury that only the unintentional can afford..."

- Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power* 16



**"THERE IS  
A WAY THAT  
PLEASURE  
HELPS US TO  
SURVIVE THE  
UNIMAGINABLE  
AND SURVIVE  
THE IMPOSSIBLE"**

**-ADRIENNE MARIE BROWN, *PLEASURE ACTIVISM***



"Imagination has people thinking they can go from being poor to a millionaire as part of a shared American dream. Imagination turns Brown bombers into terrorists and white bombers into mentally ill victims. Imagination gives us borders, gives us superiority, gives us race as an indicator of ability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone else's capability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone' else's imagination, and I must engage my own imagination in order to break free."

-Adrienne Marie Brown, *Emergent Strategy*



Photo by Terrance James, mayfield brooks and Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, *Chameleon* (The Live Arttery Installments), New York Live Arts, NY, 2019

## WHITEWALLING: ARUNA D'SOUZA AND NISA MACKIE ON ART, RACE, AND PROTEST

José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1994)

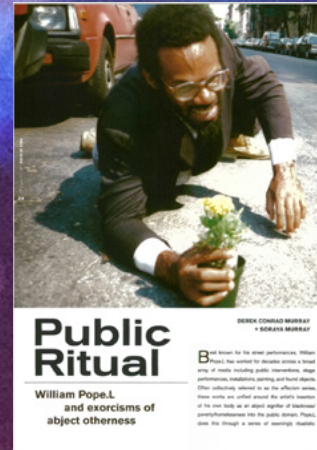
Mindy Fullilove, *Root Shock* (2004)

Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool* (2005)

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *M Archive: After the End of the World* (2018)



Photo by Zivanai Matangi; mayfield brooks, Ima Idoozee, and Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, *Chameleon* (The Jo'Burg Installments), Johannesburg, SA, 2019



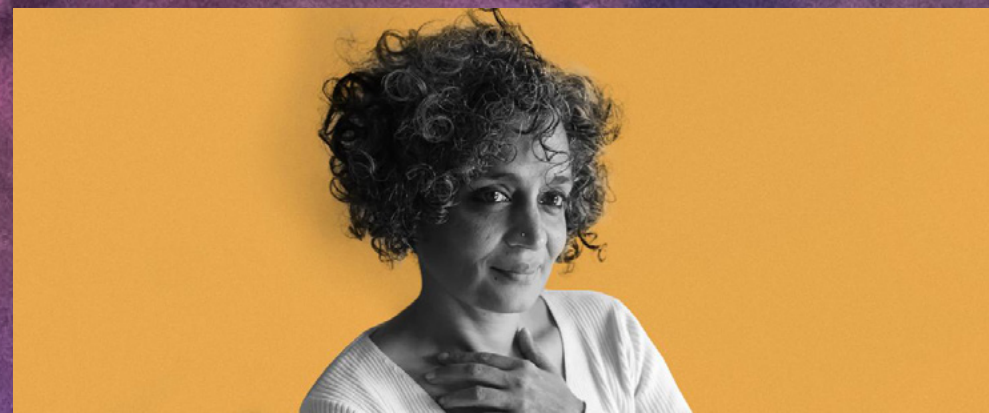
Soraya Murray & Derek Murray  
*Public Ritual: William Pope.L and Exorcisms of Abject Otherness* (2010)

Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (2014)

Arundhati Roy, *Field Notes on Democracy*

"They're mostly rich folk who live in our poor country like captive animals, incarcerated by their own wealth, locked and barred in their gilded cages, protecting themselves from the threat of the vulgar and unruly multitudes whom they have systematically dispossessed over the centuries."

-Arundhati Roy



Disappearing World Forum Q&A Session with Arundhati Roy, held at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS









On Being: Where Does It Hurt Ruby Sales in Conversation

"The heat blessed your whole new self with horizon, square-jawed boy. With such potent intent, you blared illicit and just enough saint. Now, with so many northern days between us, you are much easier to God."

-Patricia Smith, Incendiary Art



Chameleon (A Visual Album), Troy, NY, 2020

Parricia Smith, Incendiary Art

Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell* THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMUNITIES THAT ARISE IN DISASTER

Hortense Spillers, *Black White and in Color* (2003) with the essay, *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: American Grammar Notebook* (1987)

Bessel van der Kolk MD, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2014)

Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose* (1984)

PLANT A GARDEN.  
PLANT A GARDEN.  
PLANT A GARDEN.



Photo by Imma Asher, Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, Chameleon, Bates Dance Festival, Maine, 2018

WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THE BLACK FARMERS? | NBC LEFT FIELD

Video journalist, Haimy Assefa



Black farmers once made up 14 percent of America's farmers. Today, black farmers account for less than 2 percent. One of them, fourth-generation sugar cane farmer Wenceslaus 'June' Provost Jr., is fighting to maintain his family's farming legacy.

What Happened to All the Black Farmers?



# leveler.info

peer to peer wealth distribution

leveler is a tool for people with job security to help people whose work status has been impacted by COVID-19. The list includes freelancers, service industry, and gig economy workers.

Click distribute below to be shown 10 individuals to contribute to. Click the payment link for each one, and hit send. We recommend sending each person \$5.00 to \$10.00.

This is a mobile-first tool. Please participate from your phone instead of your computer.



EMERGENCY MONEY TO THE PEOPLE

We are in a health crisis, and entering an economic crisis. Let's give Emergency Money to the People.

ECONOMIC SECURITY PROJECT

## the Color Code

 <b>Green</b> Show unity and solidarity with others	 <b>Yellow</b> Isolated in home
 <b>Blue</b> Vulnerable folks in home, like elders	 <b>White</b> Extra supplies for others
 <b>Red</b> Supplies are needed	 <b>Purple</b> Folks with disabilities are in home

[thecolorcode.org](http://thecolorcode.org)

"If you can only be tall because somebody is on their knees, then you have a serious problem."

-Toni Morrison



Toni Morrison interview on "Jazz" (1993)



Photo by AZIKWE MOHAMMED, *Chameleon* (The EFA Installments), EFA Gallery, NY 2019

#PassTheCheck

Photo by HOLLY LYNCH, *Chameleon* (The LAX Installments), LAX Festival, LA, 2018





FUTURE

FUTURE

FUTURE

future

future

"FUTURE"

FUTURE

future

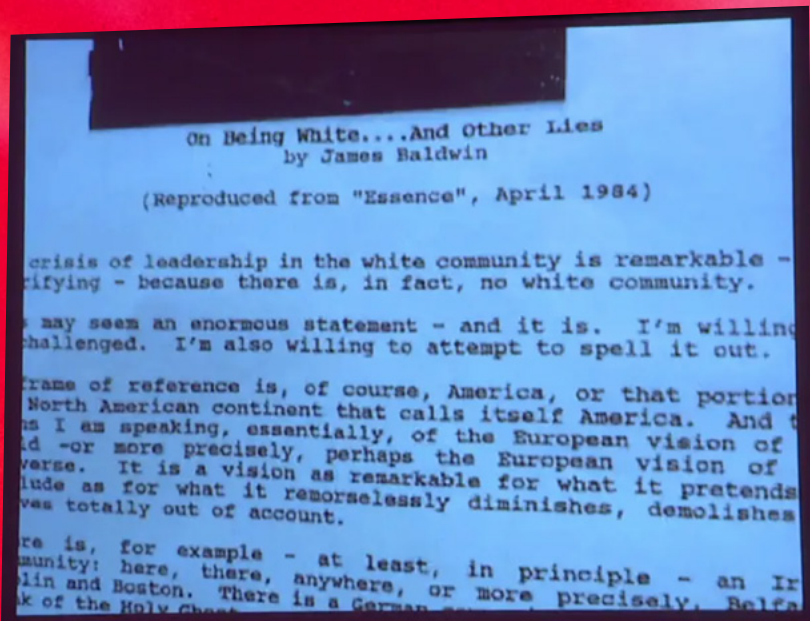
Future

FUTURE

FUTURE

Braille representation of the word FUTURE





Courtesy of Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, #negrophobia, Tanz im August, Berlin, DE, 2016



Photo by Sarah Griffith / EMPAC

- COVID-19 RELIEF RESOURCES
- MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT (Otion Front Studio)
- DISABILITY JUSTICE DREAMS
- CDC.GOV / WHO.INT
- OCTAVIA BUTLER
- MUTUAL AID 101



Octavia Butler

National Public Radio

Soul Fire Farm: BIPOC\*-centered community farm committed to ending racism and injustice in the food system.

Performances:

Okwui Okpokwasili, *Bronx Gothic*

Howardena Pindell, *Free White and 21*

Nora Chipaumire's *NORA#PUNK 100% POP \*NIGGA AT THE KITCHEN*

Jennifer Harge's, *FLY / DROWN at Detroit Artists Market*

Nina Simone, *I Can't See Nobody*

Lecture: Tina Campt, "Black Feminist Futures and The Practice of Fugitivity"

Lecture/Performance: Thomas DeFrantz, *i am black (you have to be willing to not know)*

Conversation: "Ruby Sales in conversation with Michelle Alexander about Martin Luther King Jr.'s Riverside Sermon"



American Chameleon Podcast

CODE SWITCH PODCAST

Terrible, *Thanks for Asking, What Does All This Loss Mean?*

Abby Martin, *The Empire Files: Black Radical Tradition, with Mumia Abu-Jamal and Cornel West*

Karen Thorsen, *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket*

Bong Joon Ho, *Parasite*



# CHAMELEON A SYLLABUS FOR SURVIVAL

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DESIGNER / MICHAEL VALIQUETTE  
CURATOR / ASHLEY FERRO-MURRAY



Courtesy of Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, Personal Archive, Maternal Grandmother, Ethel Ruth Anderson, Detroit, MI, circa 1988

PLEASE STAY IN TOUCH





# EMPAC

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Cover Photo courtesy of the Artist, Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, Personal Archive, 1983



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