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WATCM 02, Lesson 2, Who Owns Time?

Welcome Culture Makers. Our theme this month is *time*.

So last week we spoke about how "time is a feminist issue" (Schulte). And this week I want to talk about "the racial politics of the time" (Cooper) and what that tells us about who owns our time and what our project might be as culture makers to shift that.

But before we get started, I want to start by acknowledging that I live and work on the traditional and unceded territories of the Sto:lo Nations. And I feel like that's such an important reminder. I try to start everything I do with that reminder because it grounds me, and us, in the knowledge that we have been born into cultures of injustice. And we don't have to co-sign that. We don't have to use our lives to reinforce that. We can use our lives as culture makers to change the shape and the future of our culture so that stuff like that can no longer occur.

So this week I want to talk about who owns time generally, personally, and specifically. Who owns your time?

So, overall: who owns time in these cultures of injustice; and then who owns *your* time?

And last week we specifically talked about how time is a feminist issue (to use Brigid Schulte's words). And when I raised that topic, what I'm talking about is how, historically, women did not own their time. Women's time was the property of others.

It belonged to other people. So just as women, a hundred years ago, couldn't own property if they married or if they were single --their property belonged to their male relatives or husband-- women didn't own their time, either. And we're still grappling with the reality of that in our current day. Women's time is still undervalued and thought to belong to other people. We facilitate the lives and comfort of other people; we use our time to that effect. And what I want to talk about this week is how *that's a form of time theft*. So it reminds me of the first time that I lived in Trinidad. It must've been 2011; that was the first time I lived in Trinidad-- right after I had my baby Theodore.

We were living in Trinidad because my partner was working in Suriname, and to go back and forth between Suriname and Canada would take three to four days of travel time. It would eat up all of his time off. So he was working three weeks on, one week off. And he would basically be traveling the entire time to come home to see us.

So we decided to relocate to Trinidad, which is where he was from. And we lived in the village that he grew up in, because it was only an hour flight from Suriname. And it gave me and the kids an opportunity to live with our extended family and understand my partner and their dad a little better. So, when I was living in Trinidad was the first time I heard the phrase "stealing time" and the way that people were using it meant that a man -- heterosexual husband or partner -- was stealing time from his family and his wife. So what "stealing time" meant is after he got off work he would go around to see his girlfriend or mistress, and his wife or his partner would think that he was still at work. So he'd get off at work at three, but not show up at home until six.

So the wife would think that he finished work at five, five 30. So that's how he was "stealing time" from his family and from his partner to do whatever it is that he wanted to do. And the reason I bring that up is because what that told me is that his time was first owed to his family. And I thought that was so interesting because I'd never thought about people owning time before.

And that's actually what I want to talk about today. So that person would be stealing time from his family because he's made a promise. He's made a commitment: his time belongs to his family. And what I want to think about is who owns time, on a systemic level, in our culture, and then who owns it *your* time. Who owns individual time? And so we had talked last week about how time is a feminist issue. Meaning men systemically have owned women's time across history.. And there is this amazing Ted talk by Dr. Brittany Cooper, who is also the author of *Eloquent Rage*, --highly recommended-- but there is this amazing, earth shattering Ted talk by Dr. Brittany Cooper called The Politics of Time and it's 13 or 14 minutes long and is brilliant. And I've got a link to it in our resources. I highly recommend you listen to it. I also had it transcribed and I uploaded the transcription to our download page so you can actually read it as well. It is an extraordinary top speech called "The Racial Politics of Time".

And the basic question is who owns time? Who are the world makers and who are the space takers, in Brittany Cooper's language? I want to read something that she said in the beginning of the speech: "When white male European philosophers first thought to conceptualize time in history, one famously declared that *Africa is no historical part of the world*, he was essentially saying that Africans were people outside of history, who had no impact on time, or the March of progress. This idea, that black people have had no impact on history, is one of the foundational ideas of white supremacy. We're thinking about time and history --and who has been considered to be the makers of time and history, and who have been considered to be outside of time -- and this tells us who owns time, and that time is a property or a resource that can be controlled; *and who controls it is revealing*. It's a power construct. It reveals a power construct. So I just want us to keep thinking about this across the month and on a daily basis who owns time, and how that's been systemically- and racially- and gender- determined.

And if we think about what Audre Lorde calls "the mythic norm" and who is the mythic norm, and who is not, tells us a lot about who will have been allowed to own time, across time. So people with marginalized identities will have been considered to be outside of time, will have been considered to not be the movers and shapers of time.

So again, coming back to Brittany Cooper, those in power dictate the pace of the work day. They dictate how much money our time is actually worth. A doctor and professor George Lipsett argues that white people even dictate the pace of social inclusion. They dictate how long it will actually take for minority groups to receive rights that they have been fighting for.



Okay. The words of Brittany Cooper. And I think this is something that we're intimately grappling with: the pace of the work day; the pace at which we work; hustle culture; grind, culture; what Ije Ude calls "the culture of relentless productivity"; and the fact that so many women and people with marginalized identities are grappling with constant under-earning.

So those in power-- if we take a look at who holds CEO positions and who holds positions of elected representative-- it is disproportionately white; is disproportionately male; it's disproportionately straight and cisgender. If we look at who holds power, those are the people who get to dictate the pace at which our time is used.

They dictate the pace of the work day and how much money our time is worth. And these are like intimate issues that all of us as culture makers are grappling with. We grappled with them in the corporate workplace. We grappled with them in the entrepreneurial workspace. We grappled with them in our families and who does what and how much time goes into sort of the life giving reproductive activities in our homes that none of us can survive without. And even in our offices who takes care of the sort of invisible glue things that hold a corporate workplace together, the relationships -- Who puts their time into that? It's not the people who own time.

So here's, again, what Brittany Cooper says: "Those who control the flow and thrust of history are considered world makers who own and master time, in other words, white people".

So this is so interesting because she's using the language of world makers and we use the language of culture makers. So she's holding up the world makers-- the people who control time and who own time - -as white people and specifically. I would argue, white men. And we're using the word "culture maker" to up- end that dynamic. So when I say "we are the culture makers", I want to remind us that, although we're not occupying the seats of power yet, we actually have enormous influence on the culture.

If all of us disappeared tomorrow, the culture would cease to exist. It flows through us. It's not just something that acts on us. It's something that we can shape as well. So just as we've not been considered to be world makers, just as we've not been considered to own time as culture makers, we can reclaim those spaces. We can start shaping time. We can start shaping culture.

We can start shaping the world, and we can hold those seats of power-- but we can have that influence even right now when we don't necessarily hold those seats of power. So one of the things I want us to think about, so that we can get really granular and be culture makers in our daily lives, is to think of the tiny. Daily acts of time sovereignty.

So here's what Brittany Cooper talks about. She says,

"Ta-Nehisi Coates argues that the defining feature of being drafted into the black race is 'the inescapable robbery of time'. We experienced time discrimination, he tells us, "not just as structural, but as personal as lost moments of joy, lost moments of connection, lost quality of time with loved ones, and lost years of healthy quality of life in the future. Do you see black people in the future? Do black people have a future? What if you belong to the very race of people who have always been pitted against time? What if your group is the group for whom a future was never imagined?"

And so I'm thinking about that when I'm thinking about two interviews I did in 2016. There is a project called *Say Their Names* and the leaders of that project reached out to me and asked me if they could



hire me as a copywriter to write a script for a video that would be a supporting the book that they were putting out into the world.

I wrote the script for the video, but to write the script for the video, I had to interview some mothers of sons who had been murdered by the police in the United States. And when I say that the full weight of it doesn't really hit, but I just want you to think for a second about being on the phone with a woman who is a mother whose young adult son has been killed --and killed recently --and asking her about her son and asking her about her grandchildren and grappling with this. She's trying to be so strong, and power through the tears, and tell you about her son so that his story doesn't get lost and so that she can get some form of justice for him by saying his name in this project. It was unbelievably devastating to hold that interview. I'm tearing up now, just thinking about it. I had a son who was at the time 16, a young black son, and thinking about losing him was overwhelming. And it's, it was such a gracious act for these women to be willing to circle through that pain in order to get their stories out and to tell me those stories.

And I really held that as deeply precious. What Ta-Nehisi Coates writes about, and asks us to think about, is all the love that was poured into these children; all the resources that were poured into these children; all the time; all the driving to soccer ; , all the school meetings--

--every moment of time that was poured into these children that gets stolen from these families and from black communities by police violence.

It's a theft --and that's what reproductive justice is about. It's not just the idea that women can control their bodies, but that mothers have the hope and assurance that their children will actually grow up and live full lives. So that theft of that hope --that's theft of the time. And the love that has been poured into these children -- is a defining feature of the United States and of the history of the United States and the present of the United States. It's the history and the present of colonial nations as well. I started this workshop with acknowledging the theft from indigenous people. So those lost moments of joy, those lost moments of connection: that's what violence takes from us.

It's a theft of time -- a theft of a person's lifetime-- but I'm also thinking that the urgency that daily life proceeds with right now means there's daily time theft where just keeping up with our bills and the demands of advanced capitalism in our corporate and workplaces and our businesses. Just keeping up with those demands displaces so much love and connection and community-- which is one of the reasons we're here: because we are starved for community. So the pace of daily life is stealing community from us. It's stealing relationship from us. So the theft of these moments of connection and these moments of humanity? It's systemic, it's racial, it's gendered. And when Dr. Brittany Cooper is saying, "what if your group is the group for whom a future was never imagined", I'm also thinking about women as a class. There's a phrase out there in the world right now that says "the future is female". And I think one of the reasons that phrase has so much traction is because Brittany Cooper's putting her finger on something. Women were never imagined to have a future. Women were never imagined to be significant, to be influencing time. That's why that slogan has so much traction now because it's an emergence of the idea that women have a future and women can influence time and history.

So thinking about who owns time through Brittany Cooper's lens, and a racialized lens, and to understand that who owns time has been racial, has been systemic, is to understand that who owns time is fundamentally determined by the nature of power in our society. That lights a fire under me to say



that *my time will not be stolen from me and I'm not going to contribute my time to a system of injustice. I'm going to own my own time.*

When we toggle out and we hold the idea of who owns time and we look at it through an intersectional, racialized, gendered lens, it reveals something about our daily lives, right? The game is rigged and our time is being vacuumed away from us.

And so one of the things we need to unlearn is frittering away, and giving away, and letting our time be stolen from us. So that's one of the things we need to unlearn. How is our time being stolen? Let's pin it down and let's like reclaim it. One of the tools you can use, then, -- it's one of the TRUEx tools -- is remember what your time is for. Constantly be grounded in what your time is for, so nobody can steal it from you, and the system can't extort it or vacuum it away, or consume it with so many small tasks that you can't do your culture making work or that you can't live your life on your terms. So the kinds of questions that I ask myself are, *is What do you want to be known for? What is your life about? What are you here to do?*

These are the same questions that I ask my feminist marketing clients, too: what do they want to be known for?

In other words, what is your time on this planet for? When you remember what your time is for you get very clear, on a daily basis, of where that time needs to go.

So what's the big purpose of your life, overall?

What is your time for?

One of the things that I did -- when I first read Bridget Schultz work and was struck by the phrase, *time is a feminist issue* -- was start time-tracking, so I had an idea of what I was actually using my time for. And something popped into my head when I was looking at what I was actually using my time for was this: *What I want do I want my tombstone to say?* And when I looked at how I was using my time, my tombstone would say *she kept a clean house*. That's what most of my time was being used for. And that is *not* what I wanted on my tombstone. What I want on my tombstone is this: ***Mother. She wrote books.*** So now that's what my time is for.

So that can be a useful, morbid, forensic exercise for you. **What do you want on your tombstone?** Then compare that what you want on your tombstone versus -- if you've been time-tracking last week how -- is your time actually being used?

So I said I wanted to write books, but I only had 43 to 48 minutes a day in four minute blocks to write books. And yet I was spending five to six hours a day cleaning my house and making everybody else's chores and responsibilities in the house less. I was spending all this time doing that so that my partner was free of all of those responsibilities and could travel for work. I was spending my life cleaning the house and doing domestic reproductive labor.

Even though I said, *I am here to write books*, and *I am here to be a mother*, being a mother doesn't necessarily mean I'm here to do laundry. It doesn't mean I'm here to clean the house to state of magazine-worthy perfection -- yet that's how I was using my time.

So now we can use the TRUEx framework to learn new behaviors.



So if you know what your time is for --so for me to be a mother and to write books-- it then gets really obvious what your time should be used for, and how to re-engineer your day.

So I had to get super creative. If I wanted to write books then I needed more childcare time. If I wanted to be the kind of mother I wanted to be, I actually needed more support for my mothering --because the essence, for me, of mothering is actually the relationship. And yet I was spending very little time on the relationship with my children because I was spending 90% of my time on the scut-work of mothering, right? the Doing the laundry, the chauffeuring, the mental labor of organizing things... I was spending most of my mothering time in those activities, *which didn't have anything to do with the relationships that I had with my children.*

So I looked at that, and thought I really need more help. Fortunately, at the time I was living within a two and a half minutes drive of several family members. And I got really creative. I started swapping time with other mothers in my neighborhood-- specifically, a nurse who lived across the street, who worked a certain set shift and had children. So we started swapping time. So I would watch her children during her set shifts and she would watch mine when she was off. And then I got some writing time in. Honestly, I also honestly started putting childcare on my (overloaded) credit card, knowing that later it would result in income. I'm not saying that's a great idea, but it's what I did.

What I'm trying to say is I got forensic and ruthless. I wanted to take care of the relationship with my children, which meant I needed more support for the household domestic activities. And I wanted my own time to write, so I had to re-engineer my life and make demands on other people's time -- not just women's time, but on my partner's time and other family members time. And I also had to retract where some of my efforts were going. I had to stop being involved in my kids' schools. I had to say no to people who knew that I wasn't "working" at the time (I was on maternity leave) and who wanted me to do things for them or wanted to drop in during the day.

I had to retract my availability and my time from those kinds of things. But I'm first-- again, I'm coming back to the unlearning and learning piece-- I had to identify what I was doing with my time and whether it lined up with how I wanted to use my time in my life. And I had to identify what was stealing my time.

So what was stealing my time was the pressure to be the perfect woman, with the perfect house-- all the cleaning, all the shopping, all the decorating, and the way that I rolled all of my time into my partner's job and into facilitating his career so that he could use his time for what he intended to.

So that was being shaped up for me. It was like I was just going with the flow. Even though I held different principles, I was still making decisions that weren't lining up with my feminist principles. And I wasn't understanding that. In Annie Dillard's words, "How you spend your day is how you spend your life." *How you spend your minutes is how you spend your life.*

So I just want us to get like almost forensic and more morbid and ruthless about this. What is your time on this planet for? Make sure you're using your minutes and hours every day towards those things.

And obviously on a tombstone, there's not room for like several pages of things that you want to do. There's room for one or two things. So for me, it's 1) mother, and 2) she wrote books. The bulk of my activities every day have to support those big goals. That's what I'm here for. That's what I want to use my time in my life for.

So I have to reclaim the time that the system is extracting from me by giving me all these choices *that I didn't really choose but that I just went along with, because that's what you do.*

So I had to reclaim my time from those patterns and those social expectations --and "reclaiming my time" is a phrase that Representative Maxine Waters in the United States has made so very famous.

So here's what happened. Representative Maxine Waters was trying to interview treasury secretary, Steven Mnuchin. (I don't know if I'm saying his name right.) And House procedural rules meant that she had a certain amount of time to interview him. And she wanted to get an answer to a really specific question. And he was being evasive. He was giving her compliments. He was speaking around the issue. She would ask a question, and he would dance around it because what he was trying to do was strategically run out her time. So she couldn't get what she needed and she couldn't be effective in her purpose. He was literally trying to run out the clock and steal her time. He was trying to run out the house rules --but over and over again, she refused.

So every time she was saying "reclaiming my time", she was grabbing that time back. She was literally resetting the clock so he couldn't run out her time. This is actually obviously so much bigger than what was happening procedurally there, because she became a symbol for all of us trying to reclaim our time from people who would waste it.

That's *exactly* the point I want to make: the system has been wasting and extracting our time from us -- so that we can't be effective culture makers; so that we can't live our lives on our terms; so that we are limited and wasted in service to a system that doesn't allow us to own our own time, or own our futures, and doesn't value us, and that thinks of us as space takers rather than culture makers and world makers. And the more it can waste our time, the more than that is true. So we have to channel some Maxine Waters here. The new house rules, the new culture making house rules, are *you own your time*. The system does *not* own your time.

And that's culture making.

When you decide that you own your time for your purposes, rather than having it extracted and stolen from you, that is culture making work. It's turning history and time on its head. And in order for you to own your time, you have to be ruthless and repetitive and it has to get really fine-grained. So you have to toggle out and hold the big idea: *what is my time for?* You've got to be anchored in that and then you have to make really fine-grained decisions, a million times a day, about whether or not you're donating your time to a certain cause. So are you donating your time to the news cycle or Twitter outrage? Are you donating your time to *The Real Housewives*? (I am. And I have no shame about it.) Are you donating your time to endless volunteer activities where you're not even valued? So what are you here for? You have to make a million decisions a day to reclaim your time and dedicate it to those purposes-- because if you don't specifically decide that, and be relentless about reinforcing those time boundaries, your time *will* get stolen from you, *because none of us watching this video right now have been considered to be the time makers and world makers.*

And the system is rigged against us. So we have to be explicitly like Maxine Waters and reclaim our time, over and over again, and reset the clock so that we can use time for our purposes.

And this goes against the grain of hundreds of years of conditioning that we carry with us. And that's why there's so much guilt about this,-- because again, we claim our time for ourselves and say no to other



people's claims on our time, we're going to feel guilty because we're violating our conditioning (the conditioning that we don't own our time)

We *do* own our time, and we can reclaim our time in the spirit of Maxine Waters and culture makers.

So that's what we've got to do every day over and over again, say out loud that we are reclaiming our time.

So if something is distracting you, if something is frustrating, you, if there are demands on your time, you have to sometimes explicitly say it out loud: *"this is my time. I own my time. I'm reclaiming my time"* -- and you do that you have it as muscle memory and it becomes automatic.

So every time someone tries to put a claim on your time or waste your time, remind yourself: *you're a culture maker. Your time belongs to you. You're reclaiming your time.*

Every time that you find yourself doing something that displaces the time you want to spend on your tombstone activities-- the reason you're here-- and what you want to use your time for, you might have to explicitly remind yourself that you own your time, and that you are reclaiming your time.

Owning your time is culture making, because we've never been allowed to own our time. Historically, we've not owned our time. Our current conditioning, and the reason we feel so much guilt about claiming our time for ourselves, is because we're carrying the weight of those historical and present expectations within us.

We have not owned our time. Brittany Cooper makes it clear. Bridgid Schulte makes it clear. People who are not what Audre Lorde calls "the mythical norm"-- in other words, *not* heterosexual white men-- have never owned their time. We've never been considered to be the world makers and the time owners; that has been the province of white men.

And we don't have to accept it.

Reclaiming your time is an act of culture. Being a culture maker means you are not outside of time, that you are reclaiming your time. It's imperative that we reduce that systemic time theft in every way possible. And that means reclaiming it in a million granular ways, every single day.

And if you're finding that's challenging, toggle out, remind yourself that you own your time and that the system is engineered to siphon it away from you so that you won't be effective --much like the treasury secretary was trying to siphon away Maxine Waters' time.

That's literally an example, a symbolic example of what the system is trying to do to all of us.

So we can push back by reclaiming our time a million ways every single day. We claim it for those one or two or three tombstone activities aka *what your time on earth is actually for*. So what are our next steps? Just keep remembering: you are a culture maker, and you own your time --and act on it.

I had Dr. Cooper's amazing Ted talk transcribed, and I uploaded it too. I highly recommend that you watch the amazing Ted talk and read it. It's just something that you want to live in your bones (or at least I do). I look forward to talking with you and strategizing with you about how you are reclaiming your time; how you are retracting it from things that want to waste it so that you won't be effective; and how you are using time to your big tombstone goals. I want to talk about strategies for doing that, and I'd



love to hear your feedback and what it means for you as you start processing the ways that your time has been stolen from you.

So I look forward to having those conversations this week. Thanks everyone. I'll talk to you very soon.

