

Ash Williams

I would like to thank my beautiful Lover Tommi for supporting me and helping me prepare.

My name is Ash Williams. I use they/them/theirs pronouns. I am NC Coordinator for Sistersong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, and Development Coordinator at the Carolina Abortion Fund.

The place where my work comes together is at the intersections of reproductive justice, community organizing toward Black non-binary and Trans liberation, and combating the prison industrial complex. With that said, I am a Black Transfeminist, which is also to say I am an abolitionist.

On a day when it would seem wise to support legislative measures to protect the rights and ensure the safety of women, femmes, non-binary people, and Transpeople, my Black Transfeminist theory and praxis necessitates I push back at these measures because they fall in line with carceral feminist solutions. When I say carceral feminism, I am speaking to feminisms that support any measures that expand the prison industrial complex. Carceral feminisms do this in the name of saving and protecting women, while also excluding Transwomen, non-binary people, and gender non-conforming people. Furthermore, policing, prosecution, and imprisonment, should not be the primary solution in addressing violence against women. Especially not as the police are often the purveyors of gender-based violence in our community.

As a Black Transfeminist, I know that police and policing threaten reproductive justice, not help it. I know that access to reproductive care is highly raced and classed, as are the demographics of people who are imprisoned. I know the inclusion of Trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people, even here in this march and on this stage, is not the same as affirming Trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people's lives and self-determination. I know that when I say "my body, my decision," for me, it is never just about reproductive rights, it is about my self-determination to live my fullest Black, non-binary, and Transfemme life. I know that in order for us to move away from carceral feminisms, which allow communities of color to remain threatened and terrorized by police and ICE, we have to transform, and we have to make sure those most marginalized are at the forefronts of our consciousness, our movements, and our organizations.

So, last year, when the Mayor asked us to make space for everyone's viewpoint when selling our city to the RNC, she was asking us to make space for some of the most anti-femme, misogynistic discourses being perpetuated today.

The slogan of a New South is a reconstruction myth, and it is not real. There is actually nothing new about asking us to make space for white supremacy and misogyny, and there is nothing new about being asked to value these dangerous viewpoints as much as we value our own truths. I said NO! to the Mayor and the RNC then, and I say NO! to the Mayor and the RNC now.

We must be ungovernable! We must be a force that does not just ask for change, but demands the change that our families and our bodies need and deserve. We have to shut things down. We have to shout over those who would tell lies about our communities and our work. We have to bring other people with us – support and empower our loved ones to be part of a movement for radical, anti-capitalist, change. change.

If we are to be united, what we should be united against are carceral and Trans-exclusionary feminisms. What we should be united against are notions that we need to make space for white supremacy. What we should be united against is the criminalization of protests and protestors. What we should be united against is anti-Blackness and Queerphobia. What we should be united against is the militarized occupation of lands and people, such as the occupation of Palestine. What we should be united against is borders and walls. If we are to be United, what we should be united for is imagining a world without police and jails, where we constitute safety for ourselves and commit to keeping each other safe. We should be united for a world where trans people and Black people and neurodivergent people and poor people and young people and ALL people get to determine for themselves what kind of life they want to have. We should be united for increased abortion access and self determination for queer and trans parenting people.

What will you be united for today? What will unite us today?