



# **STILLNESS, RESTORATION, & COMMUNITY**

*Restshop, Practice, and Pedagogy  
with Octavia Raheem*

*Proposed by: Dr. LeConté Dill (AAAS) &  
Dr. Natasha N. Jones (WRAC)*

## **Stillness, Restoration, and Community: Restshop, Practice, and Pedagogy with Octavia Raheem**

Proposed by Dr. LeConté Dill, African American and African Studies and Dr. Natasha N. Jones, Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures

### **Abstract**

We invite Octavia Raheem, a nationally renowned yoga teacher, mentor, practitioner, and author to campus to help MSU faculty, staff, students, and the surrounding community to learn more about her engaged restorative practices through pedagogy and community building. Raheem will offer a 90-minute restshop (vs. workshop), be featured in a speaking presentation, and give class presentations. The proposal is a joint proposal by Dr. LeConté Dill (African American and African Studies) and Dr. Natasha N. Jones (Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures).

### **Proposal Narrative**

As Michigan State University (MSU) and the College of Arts and Letters (CAL) turn attention to ensuring inclusive, community-centered, and forward-thinking pedagogies and practices, many scholars are focusing on the inherent connection between mind-body wellness and creative and intellectual capacity. This was emphasized by CAL's response to the COVID-19 pandemic with scholars, administrators and students taking on a number of initiatives surrounding student wellness, support for caregivers, COVID relief funds for campus communities, and a culture of care that relied on values such as transparency, openness, and equity. In alignment with CAL's recognition of the importance of physical, mental, and emotional well-being, we propose to invite [Octavia Raheem](#) to engage in embodied practices and creative reflections of stillness and restoration for the MSU and Greater Lansing communities.

Raheem is a nationally-renowned yoga teacher, mentor, and practitioner who centers her practice on restoration, transformation, and creative potential, particularly for Black women and women of color. Her commitment to collective and community healing is ideal for fostering external mentorship networks and making connections to communities within MSU and the East Lansing/Lansing communities through yoga, meditation, and wellness practices. In her recent work, [Pause Rest Be](#), Raheem guides readers through simple restorative yoga poses that are emblematic of *ending*, *liminal*, and *beginning* spaces. This creates an invitation for us at MSU to consider the examination of endings, liminalities, and beginnings through our pedagogy, mentoring, and community building.

Intersectional oppressions such as racism, sexism, heteropatriarchy, and misogynoir create stressors for historically marginalized and minoritized individuals and groups that become embodied (Krieger, 2005). These embodied stressors create trauma and can manifest as grief in our lives (Miller, 2021; Parker, 2020; 2021). Feminist narratives remind us that "the personal is political." So, we are charged to consider how we can learn from trauma-informed pedagogies and practices and activate healing-engaged ones (Ginwright, 2018). Further, because an important tenet of Black feminist practice is an ethic of care (Collins, 1993), Raheem's work demonstrates what it means to care for ourselves, care for each other, and care for our communities in intentional and meaningful ways.

### **Alignment with Pedagogy**

Both Dill and Jones's work centers Black women, femmes, and marginalized genders and Black feminist practices. Dill is a transdisciplinary public health scholar and poet and investigates experiences and practices of safety, resilience, and wellness among Black girls and other youth of

color. Her scholarship, art, and pedagogy are informed by Black Feminist epistemologies and methodologies. In a recent piece (2021) entitled “Breathe into Believing,” Dill incorporates elements of poetry, creative non-fiction, autoethnography, and archival research to offer an ontology of “conjure feminism” (Brooks, Martin, & Simmons, 2021) as known, practiced, hidden, and revealed through her matrilineal lineage. The use of breath in the title and the ruminations in the manuscript are resonant in Dill’s current practices of mindfulness in partnership with colleagues, students, community members, and her own self. As a certified mindfulness instructor, she is conscious of the connections between mind, body, and spirit, and is committed to cultivating spaces for contemplative practices and pedagogies. Raheem’s clarion call that “rest is a birthright” is well-aligned with Dill’s intellectual leadership among AAAS students and faculty and staff colleagues. Such rest practices have in fact become practices of work for Dill and those in her circles.

Jones is a technical and professional communicator that examines the relationship between social justice, discursive practices, and Black feminist rhetorical practices. Much of her scholarship and pedagogy is explicit in foregrounding issues of race and injustice. For example, in a co-authored article (2022), “Archives, Rhetorical Absence, and Critical Imagination: Examining Black Women’s Mental Health Narratives at Virginia’s Central State University,” Jones offers a method for uncovering Black women’s voices, acknowledging that their historical (and contemporary) erasure points to racialized rhetorical choices that often go overlooked in technical documents, and foregrounding the importance of addressing Black women’s’ mental health. This scholarship connects to her pedagogical practices as Jones structures her classrooms around an ethic of care and invites students to bring their whole selves into the classroom space. This makes evident to students that wellness is just as important as, and even aids and supports, intellectual development. Raheem’s work aligns well with Jones’ classroom practice.

### **Project Outcomes**

This proposed programming draws together expertise from both Dill and Jones in a transdisciplinary way and reflects Black feminist and inclusive practices in several ways. The proposed programming include:

- Embraces **multivocal perspectives** by drawing together scholars with transdisciplinary focuses to examine the role of rest, restoration, and meditation from a Black feminist perspective,
- Utilizes **personal narrative approaches** through engagement with Octavia Raheem’s writings and lived experiences which will be shared in her speaking engagements and her presentations and are also evident in her authored books (*Pause, Rest., Be: Stillness Practices for Courage in Times of Change* published 2022 and *Gather* published 2020), and
- Acknowledges the **connection between mind-body** and acknowledges that **the personal is also the political**, so rest is encouraged as an act of restoration and resistance.

### **Proposed Activities**

- 1 90-minute restshop (vs. “workshop”). The restshop is experiential and includes time for discussion, connection, and dialog about rest. The restshop can take place in AAAS’ intentionally-designed wellness space in North Kedzie or it may take place in a Black-owned

space in East Lansing (SALT Yoga) or Lansing (Rock the Block Studio) in order to invite more community participation.

- A panel presentation exploring rhetorical practices of “the liminal” and/or “pausing,” “resting,” and “being”
- Presentations in Spring 2023 Classes
  - Dill AAAS 303: Black Girlhood Studies and AAAS 305: Black People & Land
  - Jones WRA 441: Social Justice as Rhetorical Practice

**Programming Timeline**

Activity	Date(s)
Secure Contracts with Raheem	December 2022
Publicity Campaign	January 2023 - March 2023
Restshop	March 2023
Panel Presentation	March 2023
Classroom Presentations	March 2023

**References**

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