SANTES Episode 4: Gerard Miller

Chapter 1a: Intro

[match strikes]
[solemn acoustic guitar]

♪♪

[flame flickers]
[long exhalation]

STORMMIGUEL (SMF): Hello, everyone. Welcome to episode 4 of Santes, a podcast for future ancestors. I'm StormMiguel Florez.

[chill lofi music]

LUNA: And I'm Luna Merbruja. In today's episode, we touch upon remembering ancestry and creating spiritual communities. I think community as a concept has been challenged a lot lately where folks are asking, what creates a community? And who does a community serve? So I'm curious, StormMiguel, in what ways have you been in community lately, and how has it fed your spirit?

Chapter 1b: StormMiguel – Living That COVID Precaution Life

SMF: Mm. I love this question. So the majority of my connections with community are virtual these days for many reasons. One is because the people I have been connecting most with are physically in other cities and states. Like our amazing connection. Another reason is that I'm still practicing COVID safety in the best ways that I can because the pandemic isn't over. So I'm not going to parties or indoor gatherings without masking. I'm not eating inside restaurants or in people's homes unless we have, like, agreements and we're practicing similar safety protocols. But, I also wanna be clear, contrary to the projected pity that gets thrown onto me, I am most definitely living my life.

LUNA: Absolutely! And, also, they won't have much to say when you outlive them.

[SMF busts out laughing]

SMF: Oh my god.

[both laugh]

SMF (still laughing): Okay. So... But, yeah, no, they won't. They won't have much to say. But I want us all to grow old, and I want people to, you know, mask up, please! Like, protect yourselves and others. It's not that hard. And, you know, I know it sucks being the only person in the room with a mask. Trust me. I know. I know this well. I know this intimately. But the more we do it, the more we are protecting ourselves and each other. Long COVID is landing people with long-term illness and disability

and lots-- I don't know. Why are so many people dying so young of heart attacks and strokes? So anyway, I could talk about that for a long time and go off. That's a whole other podcast, I think. But let's, you know, hold off on becoming ancestors as long as we can. Because there's a lot to do here and now. Again, I said, okay-- Bring it back. Bring it back.

LUNA: Yes. Go OFF, StormMiguel. Yes. You had your moment. Live in it! Take it!

[SMF laughing]

Chapter 1c: StormMiguel's Current Community Connections

SMF: Okay. I'm gonna get back to-- So in addition to Santes, I am also working on other art, community, film projects, a lot of them, more than I can mention here just 'cause there's so much that I feel like I have a hand in in some way that is feeding me, that feels very mutual, that feels very community-centered. That's what I love about filmmaking. That's what I love about podcasting, right, is that they're community efforts.

So the one I'm the deepest in at the moment is Seyi Adebanjo's film, Afromystic, which is a documentary that unearths queer and trans Òrìṣà mythology. I am so privileged to be an editor and post production producer for the film. We're meeting regularly where we just, like, dream and scheme and inspire each other, and it's just like a really big project that can be really overwhelming. I mean, they've been filming for years. Seyi has been going to Nigeria, to Brazil, filming in The United States. There's so much footage. And so we are trying to figure out how to raise the money so that we can actually just, like, spend the time we need going through that footage and getting the film made. Post production. (weakly): Woo! So but the project is huge, and the team and support has been amazing.

And in addition to that, just some other things. I'm part of a virtual weekly writing group that's been going on for four years, plugging into Film Workers for Palestine community, doing weekly virtual improv, masking up and attending live improv shows, and seeing movies with my friends and my partner whenever I can. And then I'm also hunkering down at home with my partner and our heartbreakingly adorable chihuahua, Cha-Cha.

[Luna chuckles]

LUNA: Aww, Cha-Cha.

SMF (in pain): I love her so much.

LUNA: It makes me so happy to hear your spirit is being fed through your virtual connections and all of these amazing artistic collaborations. I, for one, can't wait to see Afromystic. It sounds incredible. And as a Libra, it just warms my heart that you have a lot of love at home too.

Chapter 1d: Luna, Artistic Community, and The Grinch

SMF: Thank you for saying that! Yeah. I just feel just very, very fortunate. What about you? How's community feeding you? How are you plugging into community?

LUNA: Yeah. In the past few months, I've really craved an artistic community. And through the greater Seattle polycule, someone I went on a date with actually introduced me to his girlfriend who's this trans writer who wanted to create this small queer writing group. So when I was unemployed, I was meeting with this new group weekly at a local library, and it was so much fun. I, like, finally got some really great coworking time in, and we all became really good friends. We even had this Grinch watch party last December, the Jim Carrey version one, of course. And the whole time, we were analyzing it for its critique of consumerism and catching all the adult jokes. Like, there's this whole key party the Grinch's gay moms were having.

SMF: What?

LUNA: Oh my god. (laughing) Yes! It was a blast. And, yeah, it was so great. That writing group really inspired me to host my own virtual writing groups for QTBIPOC to create community with others too. So that's been really great.

SMF: Oh my gosh. So many good things. Utilize your public library! Host QTBIPOC writing circles! I love that you're doing all this stuff. Okay. But I have to back up here. So I haven't seen the Jim Curry (sic) Grinch, but I finally saw the original one this past December, and I loved it-- the animated one. And I'm such a sucker for mid century modern aesthetic that's in that film. I don't know if I should be admitting that, but I am. But, also, I had no idea that the Grinch had gay moms.

LUNA: Yep. It's literally canon, but the straights are in denial about it. But I just think we're gonna have to have another Grinch watch party because it's so campy and great. I think you'll love it.

SMF: Okay. Okay. I'm ready.

Chapter 1e: Introducing Gerard

LUNA: But, yes, while we're on the topic of community, I am excited and so honored to introduce our guest to the Santes podcast, Gerard Miller. This is someone I deeply admire and respect as a smart, powerful community leader. Gerard Miller is a Black non-binary queer community educator and aspiring ancestor, as well as a co-founder and member of the Seattle Hoodoo Society. Gerard works with plant medicine, birth work, movement, storytelling and keeping, and their hope is to integrate the parts of the Seven-Pointed Star, the world above, the world beneath, the world around us, and the world within.

SMF: Mm. Yes. So yeah. And in this episode, which we filmed in November, okay, so I want to be upfront about that. We are stacking them up when we have time because we don't have a lot of time. This podcast is a passion project coming from

our hearts and our own pockets. (chuckling) So we are not produced, which is why we're doing it monthly. And it still takes a lot of work. We would love to be doing this weekly, but we don't have a producer. Anybody out there want to produce us? We are open to discussing this.

LUNA: Haay. You can have our number.

SMF: Yes. Who knows? Maybe we'll have community ads in the future. I don't know. But right now, we're just seeing what we are. So... and we hope that you're loving it. Anyway, so in this episode recorded in November, Gerard digs deep into ancestry work by pulling on the threads of time and empowering everyone of every lineage to dig deeper into their own ancestral roots. They shared such powerful messages to folks who feel disconnected or discouraged from reconnecting with their ancestry. And I have been sitting with this conversation since November and just really thinking so much and being so inspired about digging into my own ancestry.

LUNA: Yeah. I feel the same way.

[chill lofi music]

LUNA: Those messages have been invaluable to me, and they inspired me to look into my own family trees. I really hope that you all take inspiration from this episode as well. So without further ado, let's welcome Gerard to the podcast.

SMF: And welcome all of you to Santes.

Chapter 2: Welcome Gerard Miller!

LUNA: Welcome. Welcome, Gerard. Welcome to the Santes podcast. I'm so excited to have you here because, I met you a few years ago and we've hung out a few times and every time we chat, we always talk about the spirits and spirituality. And when we started this project, you were someone I really wanted to bring on just to kind of share your breadth of knowledge and wealth of information. Even seeing you last weekend at the Hoodoo Festival, it was incredible just seeing you in your element! Oh my goodness! Big love, big love all around.

Chapter 3: Calling in our Ancestors

LUNA: But yeah, before we kind of jump in for today's episode, we like to start off by inviting ancestors into the space. We are gonna be talking about ancestors and being future ancestors. So just to kind of open it up, I'm burning incense. StormMiguel likes to light a candle, and then we kind of just set the space and the tone for the energy. But yeah, so is there any ancestors that you would like to call in for today?

GERARD: Today, I'm actually cheating and I'm calling in two. Two of my great aunts, my maternal grandmother's sister, Clementine "Tina" Bryant-Russum and my paternal grandfather's sister, Rachel Miller-White. I'm thinking about them in particular because Thanksgiving was their holiday, each of them on each side of my family. They were the ones to host, to coordinate, to cook a lot of, if not all of the

food. Rachel, in particular, she was known to make a few dozen cakes and pies leading up to that third Thursday. And so, yeah, I'm calling in their energy, especially this week.

SMF: Thank you.

LUNA: How about you, StormMiguel? Who are you calling in today?

SMF: So I'm calling in-- and I didn't know this-- I woke up in the middle of the night thinking my Auntie Tommie. Last night before I went to sleep, I was just like, 'anybody wanna visit?' Like, I'm open and didn't have dreams, but just woke up really strongly thinking of my auntie Tommie, who was my mom's sister. And she was really like a grandma to all of us because my grandma died before a lot of us were born. And so auntie Tommie was where, we would go to her house for anything, and there was always food. There was always sweet rice or biscochitos or empanadas. Just always something. There's just always good sweets and something on the stove.

And she was-- kind of everybody thought of her as being kind of saintly. She just seemed very kind of good and nice and, you know, pure. But I got some nice insight into how mischievous she was. I'm not gonna go into it too much, but there was some mischief there. I mean, I kind of heard her and my mom talking some shit one time while I was driving them around and I was just like, oh my goodness.

Also think that she was a bruja in a way that she may not have thought of that word, and that she was able to, I think, channel that through the saints because she was very Catholic, but she was powerful. She saw things. She knew things. And the other thing I want to say about her is that she didn't marry until she was like in her 60s. She never had kids. And she met a man, I think they met dancing, just a very expressive kind of beautiful, flowery man named Dan. And they got married in their 60s and slept in separate bedrooms and loved to dance and thrift. I'm just sayin'-- like I just feel so much kinship with my auntie and I felt so much kinship with Dan or I just thought he was the neatest thing when I was a kid. Didn't quite know why at the time. But yeah, so also bringing Dan in, Dan's spirit as well. So welcoming Auntie Tommie and Dan.

GERARD: That's sweet.

LUNA: Yeah. I love that. I wanna add my cousin Che Che into calling in the ancestors today. He plays like a really pivotal part in my kind of spiritual awakening. He was the one of the first people I experienced passing when I was a child and we were about the same age. And when we did his funeral, that's where, like, I experienced like an indigenous funeral with drumming and prayer and sage burning. And it was very different from what I-- I mean, I was a kid, I hadn't gone to many funerals, but it really set the tone as an adult for like that powerful spiritual moment of connecting with ancestors because I felt really connected to him during that ritual and that ceremony. And I still feel that now when I do ritual and ceremony. So I'm excited for today's conversation because I feel his energy here like that... you know, when the veil feels thin, I feel him there playing on the other side because he was also very mischievous.

[laughs]

He was the one like was his name wasn't Che Che, It was CHE CHE! You know? Like, 'get out of there!'

[laughter]

'Get over here!' You know what I mean? Welcome, Che Che.

SMF: Welcome, Che Che.

GERARD: Welcome.

SMF: Welcome, 'CHE CHE!'

[laughter]

Chapter 4: Gerard does nothing-- without their ancestors

LUNA: So, Gerard, to kind of kick us off for today, I'm gonna let this be as vague and open as possible to let you steer it in the direction you wanna go with it. But can you tell us a little bit about your connection to ancestor work and ancestors?

GERARD: I do nothing without my ancestors. And I mean that literally and theoretically. I explained to somebody last week-- before my feet touch the floor when I get out of bed in the morning, I say "In the names of my elevated ancestors, the most merciful, the most beneficent in whom I live, move, and have my being." I... literally could not exist, could not be here were it not for them. You know, I wear their skin, their blood flows through my veins. It is their memories, their wisdom, their legacy that shapes my personality. I was blessed to have two of my great grandmothers and one of their mothers until I was 13, 16, and 18. I was also raised in a church community with a bunch of elders, specifically the elder women where the oldest person that I knew in life lived to be 106. I had ancestors before I had elders because we would sit in those spaces and they-- the old people who were already old to me as a little kid would talk about the people who were old when they were little kids and I carry those memories.

So ancestor work, ancestor recognition, reverence is central to my life. And now in my work, it forms the core and the foundation of everything that I do pointing people toward their own ancestors based on my knowledge and connection of my own. Right? Whether it's the herbalism, whether it's the gardening, whether it's the birth work, whether it's the spiritual work, whether it's the storytelling and dance teaching, all of the little pockets and buckets that I do are dedicated. And dedicated to and informed by my ancestors. And again, like reminding people of their own connection to theirs. Little tangent: Even when I was in high school, I used to say, "Oh, white people have an ancestor problem. They don't know who they are before Rome."

LUNA: Mmmm.

Chapter 5: Queer and Trans People Reclaiming Ancestry

GERARD: So part of my work also in like interpersonally and in community is to say, 'Hey, wait, wait, wait. Deconstruct the last like 200 years. What are your defaults? Where did they come from? And can you figure out what you had before that?' Right? In some of the spaces that you and I have been in, Luna, working clandestinely, to do some ancestor work to help people through things, reminding people that even if all of the people that you have experienced in your family, in your community, in your bloodline that you knew as living people were-- can I cuss on this podcast?

SMF: Yes, you can.

GERARD: Okay. Thank you. If you knew-- if all the people that you have known as living people were shitty, there is somebody in the last two to five hundred years, who wasn't an 'ain't shit' person.

[verbal appreciation from hosts]

GERARD: Like there is some presence out there, there is some legacy out there, there is something, someone out there for you to latch onto who survived similar and worse shit than you did, who managed to be a decent human being. And like reminding people also of like their own birthright in that aspect because we go-- as queer and trans people, we go no contact with our family sometimes, or forced out of situations and that creates this rift where we feel like we don't have access to, or a right to our own cultures, our own traditions, our own whatever, our own identities. And I'm like, no, that is your birthright. The people who hurt you don't have the right to deny you that. You reclaim it.

SMF: Mm... Thank you so much you so much for saying that piece because I do feel like that is so true that we as queer and trans people tend to lose that access or we think we lose access. We think it's taken from us because someone says it is or because someone acts like it is. And I know for me, like, I have often felt like, I don't know if I can even trust my ancestors in my own, kind of lineage. So I often reach out to transcestors. I reach out to people that, you know, I know who they were. And then the most recent ancestors who I actually had relationships with. But I love this idea of reaching back and just trusting that there's someone back there who would've had my back, whose back I would have had, you know, like there would and there still can be that relationship. Thank you for saying that. I think that's just so necessary for us to hear.

GERARD: I live life as a Black person in America, but I have... ancestry says roughly 20% European DNA, a lot of that from England and Ireland. I reach back. Way back. I'm like, okay, especially the Irish ones, some of y'all, you know, before-- again pre-Rome or before you got too Catholic, before you got caught up in all of the patriarchal crap, I'm like 'somebody back there--' so I just kind of reach out in the dark, I'm like 'one of y'all, also come get your children.'

[hosts chuckle and swoon]

Chapter 6: Going Above Ancestors' Heads

GERARD: One of the things I advise people in those fractious relationships both with like... people that they know personally and also these systems, I'm like just the same way as if you were a little kid and you were arguing with your sibling or one of your cousins, and they did something and you ran to the common adult, right? You ran to Abuela, you ran to your auntie, you ran to your parent or the adult in the situation, I tell people go above their heads. So if you're beefing with your mother, go to your grandmother. If you're beefing with your grandmother, go to her grandmother in the spirit and say, "Hey. Hey. Hey. Hey. Big Big-- Big Big mama... Bisabuela I need you to come gather your children.

[SMF and Luna are speechless and can only vocalize quiet awe]

LUNA: I got shivers from that. I'd be terrified, but also

[understanding laughter]

empowered. Like, honestly, both because it is-- it's disrupting that pattern, right? And I think that, as someone who did go non contact with a lot of my family members, that is so scary to me to be like, what? I have to tell someone? And that someone's gonna do something about it? But also that feeling of, like, just even this moment of, like, real time, thinking, like, wow, how protective would that feel if an ancestor came through and stepped in to intervene? Right? That is a powerful message, Gerard. Thank you for that.

GERARD: Absolutely.

[pensive acoustic guitar] ♪♪

Chapter 7: What kind of ancestor do you want to be?

SMF: Okay. So one of the things about this podcast and one of the reasons that we started the whole Santes Project was, like I said earlier, I don't know always kinda how to relate to my ancestors. I don't know what they-- how they wanna be related to. And so we've started this whole form of like, well, what do you want? How do you wanna be related to as an ancestor? How do you want people to get your attention when you become an ancestor? And so we're asking everybody that, like, what are your thoughts around that? How do we get your attention? Right? We want it to be a long time from now. We want us all to, like, live and be elders long before we're ancestors. We know that's not always the case, and we're just accepting of it all. But also accepting that, yes, someday we will be ancestors. And so we wanna have that frank conversation with folks. We'd love to hear how do we get your attention? What are your thoughts? What kind of ancestor do you wanna be?

GERARD: I'm gonna answer the second question first.

SMF: Okay.

[Gerard chuckles]

GERARD: And then the first one. The kind of ancestor that I want to be (takes a breath) is one... seen as... affirming and empowering, in the sense that I remind you to look at yourself. Because what I try to do in life is to remind people of their own power. I can't give you power and in some of the ways that I've been taught as far as my spiritual training, I can't actually give you wisdom. I can give you information but it has to resonate with what's inside and then you have to operationalize it. So the kind of ancestor that I want to be is one who inspires... and one who... calls you to own your own strength and the responsibility that comes with that.

Chapter 8: “My feast, my service” – How to venerate Gerard as an ancestor

GERARD: The way that I would like to be venerated, contacted, Mmm... My favorite colors are purple, dark red, and electric blue. I like overproof white rum and Tennessee or Kentucky whiskey.

SMF: Mhmm.

GERARD: If you can get some corn liquor, I will accept that as well.

SMF: Alright.

[laughter]

And a nice-- Let's say if we're looking at wine, Riesling... and a, Tempranillo or Malbec wine. I'm just going in. - I love it. Keep it going.

GERARD: My feast, my service, right.

[laughter]

Dark chocolate 70% and above, the smells of oud and frankincense or copal, sweet grass, and Egyptian or African musk. Playing early 2000s, late 90s Baltimore club music, 70s disco, or funk, and, like, the stuff that I play for my High John right now, which is blues made by and for Black people before 1950.

SMF: Okay.

GERARD: And traditional gospel.

LUNA: Yes.

GERARD: My goodness. I can't leave that out. That was just the liquor and the food.

[laughter]

and the drink and the music. The food: curry goat--

SMF: It's a banquet. I love it.

GERARD: rice and peas,

LUNA: Yes.

GERARD: Plantain, goat pepper stew, jollof rice, some good fried white fish, catfish or whiting. I'm from Baltimore. Roots in the-- in Maryland, Virginia, and Carolinas.

LUNA: Do you want some blue crab?

[laughs]

GERARD: If...

[Luna laughs]

You. Know. what you are doing.

[laughter]

With coastal Mid Atlantic blue crab, much respect to Louisiana and them, I do not want you to boil my crab. I want steamed crab with the Old Bay on the outside. I don't need it on the inside of the shell. Do not make a crab cake unless you are taught how by a person from below the Mason Dixon line.

[laughter]

And like specifically, from Delaware to North Carolina, I don't want it. Thank you very much.

SMF: Okay. Okay.

[Gerard laughs]

LUNA: I love it. That was the entire Santes form. We appreciate it.

SMF: Yeah. You just filled it out.

[laughter]

SMF: Well okay, so let's say, Luna and I, we're on our way to this feast honoring you. Mercury's retrograde. We've got everything all screwed up. We got the crab. We got it from the wrong place. We find out on the way. No, you can't even bring that near. And the only place between here and there is the hardware store, and we have to stop and get something. That's the only place we know that we can go and actually get something for you. What should we grab at the hardware store that will add to

this feast in the sense of not necessarily to eat, but just that will help, that will honor you.

GERARD: At the hardware store, you can actually probably find some food that I'd take.

[laughter]

In that case... In that case, get some Peanut M&M's, a Pepsi.

SMF: Okay.

GERARD: That's easy. If nothing else Peanut M&M's and some Pepsi, we're good.

SMF: Okay. Whew! We're so glad that we're not completely gonna show up empty handed

[laughter]

and insulting you.

GERARD: Understand we got to venerate on a budget sometimes.

SMF: You know what?

LUNA: Yeah.

SMF: Exactly. And sometimes that budget is a time budget, you know.

GERARD: Mmhm.

SMF: We're doing the best we can, but we wanna honor you in all the ways.

GERARD: And play some music.

SMF: Mhmm.

LUNA: Absolutely.

GERARD: And actually dance.

SMF: Yes.

GERARD: Don't do that. Oh, I don't know. Fly on the walls. No. If this is for me, sweat.

[laughter]

LUNA: I love the clear directions. I know exactly what to do. I'm ready to party, ready to celebrate.

[70s disco music]

♪♪

Chapter 9: Altared Roots

LUNA: So, Gerard, I'm curious about some of the work that you're doing now. You talked about your connection with ancestors, but kind of like, to share some of the work that you do on a day to day basis. Just open invite, like, any projects that you're working on right now? I know you have an herbalism business going on. So, yeah, tell us a little bit about that.

GERARD: I am the founder and creative director of Altared Roots LLC, which is sort of the umbrella for all of my different work. It's a catch all that includes Altared Roots Apothecary, where I make handmade herbal remedies and those include everything from immune support, pain relief, reproductive function, energy and mood.

There is Altared Roots Conjure, which is where I provide spiritual services and tools. So I offer bone readings and card readings. I offer a spiritual mentorship program to a select few by application. I make spiritual tools including travel altars, charms, oils, and sprays for everything from protection and blessing to attraction and wealth building. I teach educational workshops in that vein as well.

There is Altared Roots Doula. I'm a full spectrum birth worker. So everything from fertility support, people trying to conceive, abortion and loss support, pregnancy, birth, postpartum, gender transition, menopause, death, and grieving. As they said in, West Side Story, womb to tomb, 'boith ta oith.' (birth to earth)
There is Altared Roots Griot, which is sort of tailing off of that last piece, works from everything from legacy work, helping your descendants or rather helping yourself immortalize you so that your, descendants can can honor your memory. That involves storytelling, that includes cultural presentations and other performance arts bringing out the more say, spectacular sensational aspects of Afro-Indigenous culture.

Then there's Altered Group Studio which is more a direct artistic expression. So right now I'm working in linocut. So I'm making prints on paper with a oil based medium and I'm really enjoying doing watercolor over those. And they have messages of like feminist activism, queer identity and justice, Afro-Indigenous legacy and memory and whatnot. So that sort of Altared Roots, like I said, it's it's everything in one container.

Chapter 10: Seattle Hoodoo Society

I'm also one of the cofounders of the Seattle Hoodoo Society, where I'm helping to gather folks here to one, just hang out, because there is precious little space for Black people, especially Black Americans, to gather in Seattle in a place that is fully empowering and embracing of identity without a whole bunch of other stuff going on, that's rooted again in ancestorhood and tradition that doesn't also come with the misogyny or the queer phobia, or the da-da-da. And also to give people a touch point

for learning about Hoodoo Rootwork Conjure, which are the African American branch of the African diasporic traditions family tree. Right?

People will talk about Lukumí or Santería that was birthed in The Caribbean. People will talk about Obia and Mayal and Winti and Candomblé and they're given a lot of credence because they're recognized by outsiders. And again, with that empowerment and having folks look within and look toward their own ancestors, we have a rich cultural tradition that includes spiritual practices, that includes herbal wisdom, that includes ethics, that includes philosophy and understandings of the cosmos.

And so Seattle Hoodoo Society is trying to be a base for that. Here at the Pacific Northwest, we are focusing now on Seattle with a mind to expand to the Pacific Northwest in general. We have some partners who are working out of Portland right now, North Star Hoodoos. But this year, we had our first annual-- and thank you so much, Luna, for coming.

LUNA: Mhmm.

GERARD: We're speaking it as the first annual Seattle Hoodoo Arts and Culture Festival. And we're starting in Seattle, but with the vision of the Northwest Hoodoo Arts and Culture Festival, someday. Where we will be able to have people from Portland, Oregon to Victoria, BC and out to Spokane, if not into Montana.

LUNA: Yeah. That was an incredible festival. Oh my gosh, I learned so much from you, Gerard, and just from everyone there too. There were so many great storytellers, and it was such a warm welcoming community. Like I sat down and someone immediately started talking to me, and I made friends and we started sharing food and it was such a great community event. And you know Seattle, the 'Seattle freeze,' it's not very friendly up here so I was not expecting that. And it was such a warm change being in that space. And I just think the way that everything was set up, everyone was just talking, eating, all the programming was incredible. I made a sweet jar afterwards and it's going very well. Thank you for that. Gerard led an amazing workshop talking about mojo energy work and really gave us information and took with it and got some wisdom by practicing.

But yeah, just hugely appreciative of you doing this work. It's so sacred and valuable, and there's not many spaces, especially here in Seattle, that do any type of spiritual work. So just really, if you all are in the area, please come check out these events. They're completely open and folks are like, like I said, super friendly, super warm and welcoming, and it's a great place if you haven't experienced, if you're new. I'm someone who's new to Hoodoo and it was something very informational for me and I got a lot out of it.

GERARD: I'm so grateful for that reflection 'cause that is what we want. All of our events, the first thing is just thawing that freeze, because Seattle is very much an insular and siloed space. And people, especially if they're unfamiliar, if they come in not necessarily knowing or being close to anybody, if the space itself is not actively welcoming, then it's hard to find a foothold. And then what's the point?

So like we did in June, right around just after Juneteenth actually, we had a juke joint event in Columbia City. I used intentional marketing framing to map it onto the Sinners movie because recently that's the biggest public depiction of Hoodoo that's out there. And so it was, again, the idea was we're having this juke joint just like if we were going to Annie's or Pearline's or whoever they called it at the time. And you had food, you had some drink, we had card games, we had people who volunteered during the party to teach people how to play spades so that you don't have an excuse in this room. And then also taught people how to make mojos and we had planned on doing a circle dance but didn't get to it. But the most important thing was even if we didn't get to a third of the things that we had planned, people walked out of there feeling nourished. They walked out of there having met and made community and then empowered with some knowledge that they could take forward and apply because as my elders taught me, wisdom is the application of knowledge.

Chapter 11: How to find Gerard

SMF: Mmm... Amazing work that you're doing. And I'm really excited to continue to learn more about it. I was reading up on you before I got excited to learn about your doula work and all the other work you're doing. How can folks find you if they want to learn more about who you are, what you're doing, what your services are, who you offer them to, that kind of thing, right? So want to be clear that you may not be offering your services to everyone. Like you said, you have some folks that you will work with in certain capacities. So, how can folks find you and anything you wanna say about that?

GERARD: Sure. My website is altaredroots.com. All one word, it's A-L-T-A-R-E-D altar, like the one you pray at. Alteredroots.com. The social media, whether Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Blue Sky, A-L-T-A-R-E-D.roots and then Seattle Hoodoo Society is @SeattleHoodoo, one word. I will work with anyone as far as herbalism is concerned.

SMF: Mhmm.

GERARD: I will offer art to anyone. I will offer readings to everyone I'm allowed to. Sometimes I have to do like a-- I give like an internal check and I'm like, okay, let me make sure first. Let me ask about this. I will offer house blessings among my spiritual services to almost anyone. And then other-- like, there are specific spiritual tools that I will not sell to white people. There are certain spiritual work that I will not do for white people. Straight up. Because, again, if I'm pointing people toward their own ancestors, we are talking about a group of people who have the most well documented history of people on the planet. There are libraries filled with European custom, tradition, folklore, medicine, what have you.

SMF: Thank you.

GERARD: Go home. Get out of my broom closet. Right? Give up the Victorian penchant for moving all over the planet and grabbing up other people's stuff while disregarding or sidestepping the people themselves. Mhmm. Go to your own great grandmother's traditions. There are-- and I say this not in just a dismissive way. I'm encouraging you because it is rich. There are people of Slavic descent and people

who are still in Eastern Europe right now who are working on reviving and promoting Slavic tradition. There are people in Italy who are bringing back Strega. There are people in, or descendants of Scandinavians who are bringing back Norse culture and traditions. There is richness there.

There is legacy. Again, who were you before Rome? Right? Before you were a white American, which was only within the last 150 years because if you're Italian, Greek, Jewish, German-- Irish, especially, you were not white until after the second world war when your parents made a conscious decision. Well, not your parents, but, you know, somebody in your line made a conscious decision to leave their ethnic neighborhood in the inner city, move out to the suburbs, abandon the Black and native people that were there. And when I say native, I'm including people north, south, east, and west of this so called American border, abandon us in the inner city. You went out to your suburb and embraced whiteness and the racism that came with it. But before that, you were Italian. You were Irish. You were French. You were, again, Greek. You were wherever you were from. Go find that.

And then when you get to that country, if you know what town, then there are clans, there are ethnicities within that. There are stories. There are legacies waiting for you to go get them. If I can give you a piece of African wisdom, it is the principle of Sankofa that we get from the Akan people of what is now Ghana and Ivory Coast. The word Sankofa is a-- or Sankófa you might hear it pronounced, is the truncated version of a proverb that says it is not taboo to go back and retrieve what was lost. Go back and fetch it. Reach back, as some of my first teachers, Sankofa Dance Theater in Baltimore, where the, slogan is 'reaching back to move forward.' Go back and get it. Get out of my business. Get out of my mess. You don't need my candles. You don't need my mojo. You don't need my grandmother's traditions. Yours has her own.

Chapter 12: Access was denied (not lost)

SMF: Yes. Thank you for just breaking that down. I think that is so important to be reminded of for all of us even, you know, even folks who aren't white, right? Like we people who are, you know, Latine, Chicane, you know, we definitely have our own unlearning to do and, you know, and things to figure out about our lineage. We've lost some of that as well, or a lot of it or all of it, you know? And so to go back to what we know and and sometimes we don't have that option. We don't know what that is. That's where, you know, we come into being non-white is we lost access to so many of those things, right.

GERARD: Yeah, I want to challenge that though. Access was denied, not lost. It's what I said before with your bloodline and your ancestors, the southern border is fake.

SMF: Mhmm.

GERARD: The borders all over these maps are fake. Right? They were put upon us by the people who invaded, who raped, stole, and slaughtered. The-- I don't wanna get their name wrong. The Ohlone people and the O'odham people along the Rio Grande exist on both sides of the border. The Lakota and Anishinaabe people and

the Haudenosaunee exist on both sides of the US Canada border. And the trade routes are more ancient than even the identities of the people who we talk about now as Maya, as Nahua, as what have you, and it's there.

So you might not know again, a living human being who speaks that language or spoke that language, who taught you that culture growing up, but somewhere there is a book, somewhere there is a recording, somewhere there are images, whether photographs, paintings, sketches. Somewhere in that region right now there are villages of elders whose indigenous languages are die-- What is the-- the statistic is, we lose one language every two weeks, an indigenous language every two weeks in this world. There is an elder who is carrying a library on her back because no one is interested in learning. And again, it might not be the exact tradition or the exact people that your family came from. It might have been the neighboring one where, because all of yours were displaced because all of yours were Christianized, because all of yours were terrorized, because all of yours got subsumed into mestizaje and lost the specific connections.

And then we get into the whole Latin-- and Latin to include the French and Portuguese, the like racial caste systems and all the discrimination that came with that, like there is richness in there. Don't be Frida Kahlo and saying, 'oh, because I'm indigenous like this over here, then I can just run up in any and everybody's, you know, stuff everywhere else in Mexico' because that ain't cool. Right? Be respectful.

As an elder in, Little Tokyo told a group of us years ago in LA, "Anyone is welcome as long as they take their shoes off." So just if you're gonna walk into somebody else's place, if you're gonna walk into somebody else's tradition, even if you are on a mission to embrace your own ancestral culture, take your shoes off.

LUNA: Thank you, Gerard. I deeply resonate with that, as someone who's, yeah, like I mentioned, no contact with my family, I had to pick up traditions from books from other folks I know who are living, friends, community. There is a bit of a hump I had to get over feeling like, oh, this isn't my grandmother or my great grandfather's tradition or practice. But in connecting with community, I do feel more connected to the folks literally in my life around me and then also to my cultural practices as well. So to anyone who's feeling energized by this conversation and hearing that message of it's okay to reach back, even if it's not your own family, please let that be heard. Let that reverberate within you. It is absolutely okay as long as you take your shoes off.

GERARD: And if African Americans can do this work of cultural and historical recovery, and when our ancestors were considered objects, their names were not recorded. Their histories were-- unless you were lucky enough to be in a place like New Orleans, their histories were not recorded. They were commodities, property that were traded. And if we are able to reconnect those dots, reform those linkages, then respectfully, I don't feel like most other people have an excuse.

[70s disco keyboard interlude]

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Chapter 13: Thank you, Gerard!

LUNA: Whoo!

SMF: This has been a really just deep, enriching, sacred conversation with you. Thank you, Gerard, for joining us today and for sharing the information and inviting us to dig deep within ourselves and our own ancestral wells and find the wisdom there. We really appreciate you.

GERARD: Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate you welcoming me in.

LUNA: Thank you, Gerard.

[70s disco music]

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Chapter 14: Outro with Luna and StormMiguel

LUNA: That was everything!

SMF: Yes! Thank you, Gerard, and thank you, Luna, for introducing us. Gerard has given me so much to think about, especially the reframe of our ancestral knowledge not being lost, but being taken. Like, I've always known that or I've known that for a long time, but I never really say it that way. So it's a really good reframe for me.

LUNA: Exactly. I really felt that too. I am still sitting with their wisdom and feel really changed by this conversation. I have looked at my own ancestry now with more possibility and openness than before. It's been so great to feel that.

SMF: Yeah. Yeah. And, hey, if y'all feel compelled to share how you want to be remembered when you become ancestors, please check out our santes form on our website @www.santesproject.com.

LUNA: Yes. And when you're done filling out the form, let us know what you think of this episode by commenting on our Instagram page @SantesProject.

SMF: Thank you for listening.

[melodic acoustic guitar]

We hope you all enjoy the communities and ancestors that you're connected to.

LUNA: See you on the other side.

SMF: And this one too.

♪♪

END

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