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Participants:
MARTIN SMALL
JOHNSON SIMON
CIERRA JOHNSON
MARCUS JOHNSON
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Preface

The following conversation was hosted at the Crispus Attucks Museum, facilitated by Aja Scarlato and Keondra Bills Freeman. Consent was given by the participants to have their conversation recorded and transcribed.

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START OF RECORDING

AJA SCARATO: Good. And... [Pause] Good. Okay, no touching the mics, but feel free to shuffle the cards however you want to. Um, and just have fun.

JOHNSON SIMON: All right, cool.

CIERRA JOHNSON: Thank you.

AJ: Yup. You're welcome.

MARTIN SMALL: Okay, *What forms of segre-of self segregation exist today?*

[Crosstalk]

JS: Again.

[Crosstalk Ends]

MS: My name...*What forms of self-What forms of self-segregation exist today?*

My name is Martin Small. I have a company called *RSL*, and I'm just asking this question.

CJ: [Chuckles]

JS: Hey. My name is Johnson Simon. I am an artist at the Harrison Center. And to answer the question, hmm, *What form of self...*I will have to get back to that.

MS: Mm.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

CJ: Okay. My name is Cierra Johnson. I'm an artist at the Harrison Center. Um, tch...I think that it's really easy to stay with people who are like you. I think it's comforting to be um--especially for Black people--to be in the presence of their own culture, and to see people who look like them. But I think it also can be limiting, because the world [Pause] is so much more than just your culture. I think that it's easy to stay on, right like you're "own the side of town." I'm on the Eastside and I don't—I tend to stay on the East side, unless there's a very specific reason to come across Meridian [Street]. Like this--like today's conversation--got me to come across town, and mix it up with people I don't know. So, it's really a matter of learning to be uncomfortable, and explore what's outside of your kind of regular routine.

MARCUS JOHNSON: My name is Marcus Johnson. I'm the son of Cierra Johnson. I feel like one of the forms of self-segregation that goes on currently is, what she said. Just, stayin' round your own people. I tend to like to hang around Black people, and other people of color, rather than Caucasians, 'cause it just makes me feel more comfortable.

MS: Mm.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

JS: To come back to that question--this is Johnson Simon-I would say I'm also really comfortable with um, um with the disability community, 'cause I know I'm not being—I could be f-free myself.

MS: Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

JS: 'Cause you know sometimes, there are some things about my disability, I try to be—So much that might appear...I'll be ah, 'Oh man, I wish they didn't get...I hope they didn't see that part of "you against me." '

MS: Right.

JS: But you know, it's all the mind game. You know?

MS: Mhmm.

JS: You get get so self-conscious, when you overthink stuff.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: Yeah yeah. Well you know, I'm-I'm-I'm--once again Martin Small, RSL's a company; we have a podcast called "The Road to Legacy" podcast in New York City. Now I'm-I'm from New York, and comin' to Indianapolis and all my friends and--not all my friends, but some of my friends--in New York were like, "There's actually Black people in Indiana?"

[Laughter]

JS: [Inaudible - 00:03:38-00:03:39]

[Laughter]

MS: [Laughs]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: You know? It-they're like, you know, 'Is it...really...What are you going to Indiana for? What's going on in Indianapolis? Why?' And then you know, it's because we-we segregate ourselves in certain forms, even in our minds when it comes to thinking about, you know, if there's "others" out there. And then especially if we don't travel. And I've met people in Harlem, where I'm from, and here in Indy that just don't even leave their blocks. So yeah, I think we do, I think we do, I mean, separate ourselves in certain forms. I mean, [Exhales] that-that's all I can-that's all I can say about that situation.

CJ: I mean...[Pause] It-there's—You need space to-where you can be your full Self, and be comfortable, and I think that that's super important. But I think it's also important to mix it up. To make a point to get out of your zone, and out of your bubble. 'Cause you never know, like what you could find, or what you could discover.

JS: Yeah.

CJ: You could be in a whole different type of community, if you would just-right leave your box, and leave your zone. Like, I wouldn't have discovered anything like this on the Eastside, um at least not that I know of. I might discover this similar kind of community on the Eastside by being here. Somebody can tell me you know, 'X-Y-and-Z is happening at...' I'm gonna state some local names; P30, and at Eastern Star we are doing this work. But I wouldn't have found that out without leaving my house...um--.

[Crosstalk]

MS: Right right right.

JS: Mhmm. Yeah.

CJ: Or that they-that your podcast out of New York. Like, I'da never met you--,

MS: MS: Right right.

CJ: Without coming over here to this.

MS: Well you met me now.

CJ: Yeah.

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

JS: For example, I wanted the thing that I-I also knew from-from my family; people that are from different cultures that are not American, they could get real comfortable with...for example, I'm Haitian. Around-when I'm around my Haitian family, and I'm eating the Caribbean food, I get real comfortable, 'cause--...

[Crosstalk]

MS: Yeah yeah yeah. [Laughs]

JS: It's home. It's almost like, even though we live in a whole different country, but you still got that root of where you came from.

CJ: Mm, mhmm.

MS: That-that root of where you're from. Right. [Pause] Right right.

JS: Yeah.

MS: I mean, it-it-it-it it just changes my way of thinking, um--,

JS: Mhmm.

MS: You know? It just changes my way of thinking in so many ways, when it comes to dealing with people, that are-are melanin-deficient--

[Laughter]

JS: Yeah.

MS: If I must say--.

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: Meaning that ah-ah...[Pause] I was asking the doctor--Dr. Alex Lichtenstein, Lichtenstein--a couple of days ago, about why he would do this exhibit because he's a white man. And, you know, there's so many people that are in the cause--and in the fight for the rights, for our rights--even in some cases more than we are. You know? We have exhibits of--here of people being lynched, and--and ah, which helps us. And and art, art, art, art--you guys are artists--so art of people being lynched. And then sometimes the younger people don't see it as being important. They don't see it as a—They don't look towards the vote, in other words. I know I'm all over the place, but voting, they don't look towards family like we were talking about earlier, how we all got along. There was a certain time no matter what went on, family came through. Even in racist situations, there would be family that would help you and back you. So the question that--I was just looking at one of the cards here, knowing that we're in a school that I think--I don't know if I'm wrong or right--that was built by the Ku Klux Klan, back in the day. Alright? They--I think they called it the Thomas Jefferson School at one point, if I--if I did my research. Now it's the Crispus Attucks School. They brought people from all over to teach at this school. It was the number one school where basket kinda-basketball kinda came out of,

also education kind of came out of, and they had this exhibit in this school [Sound of arm tapping on the tabletop]. So the qu-the-the question is-is-is, how should Indianapolis deal with the legacy of the Ku Klux Klan's control in the 1920s? Like the Ku Klux—This is the home of the Ku Klux Klan. So it's amazing how we have this beautiful art and all of this stuff here in this school, in a-in a city that Ku Klux Klan was bo-born from.

[Pause]

JS: That's a good...

MS: [Chuckles]

JS: Well, for example, I'm a big believer of-of the [Inaudible - 00:08:25]. For example, I believe that you can't allow your past--the thing that happened to you you-you--the bad thing that happened in the past, becoming your future--,

[Crosstalk]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: Right right.

JS: Is that you get a whole new [Inaudible - 00:08:45-00:08:46]. You're not using that tool, to make it who you are today. You can take some of that history, and-and you can heal from it--.

MS: Right.

JS: And then, and then instead of being divided, you can be all, 'Okay, this is what my great-great-grandparents did; What can I do? What can I take from it, and how can I make it my own?'

MS: Right right, right right right.

CJ: No, I'm-I'm in agreement with a lot of what Johnson said. I think it's really about acknowledgement. Like saying, like, 'Yes, this building was built by The Klan and that they did exist. And that they were in the state, and they were very much running, you know, a racist--,

MS: They were running everything back in the day.

JS: Mhmm.

CJ: [Chuckles] A racist--,

MS: Right.

CJ: You know, government and everything.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

JS: Is um...

CJ: But then it's about, right, like reclamation. So if you can take that history and you can make something as wonderful and incredible and as important as Christmas Attics, then you can take anything and turn it like, into gold. You know, um...it's about that acknowledgement. And I think it's like saying, like, the facts of even like, further than The Klan, but even going back to slavery. Saying the facts of chattel slavery, and not like denying it, in schools anywhere else. Like--,

MS: Ya-what-what, what is chattel slavery?

CJ: Oh. [Chuckles]

MS: Ah-some people...I—What is chattel slavery?

JS: Yeah break that down.

MS: Some people don't know what chattel slavery is, believe it or not--.

[Chuckling]

MS: But please, tell us what chattel slavery is.

CJ: Well, I-I try to make the distinction, and I'm not a historian, um, but, like as opposed to indentured servitude, where you might like owe somebody and go work for them willingly to pay off a heavy debt, which has its own set of problems but...And then there's like, chattel slavery when you are forced into servitude, through like violence and racial discrimination--,

MS: Yeah.

CJ: And like all the very bad things that you associate with slavery, are included in chattel slavery.

MS: Isn't-isn't chattel slavery also..that-that—Yeah, that's a great definition. Isn't it?

JS: Listen to you.

[Laughter]

MS: It is; I'm telling you it is. But you know what it is? It's al-I think it's also generational, right--?

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: That's the only time that they put people in bondage, that their children's children's children...right?

CJ: Yeah.

MS: Right, was in bondage forever, and that's what chattel slavery is. And then, that's when-when they tell us that we have to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps--or Black-on-Black crime, or all that stuff--you have to look at what chattel slavery is about. [Sound of hand rapping on the table] I knocked on the desk--.

CJ: Oh yeah. [Chuckles]

MS: You have to look at what chattel slavery is about, to actually understand that. That's deep; I forgot all about...Oh man, that's deep.

CJ: Yeah. [Laughs]

MS: That's deep.

JS: [Inaudible - 00:11:26-00:11:32] is-is about [Pause] they sayin' that, 'Hey, your grandparents are dead, so you gotta pay it back.' How much do we got to pay it back?

MS: Right right right.

JS: Yeah.

MS: Right right right right. That shit's crazy.

JS: Does it keep going, going, going, or when is the whole debt it paid? If you [Inaudible - 00:11:54-00:11:57] in judgment?

MS: Mhmm.

JS: If they want to, they can make it keep going, going, no matter what.

MS: Goin' on and on and on.

JS: Yeah, wow.

MS: Wow. It-it-it it's-it's, I mean. Bein' in this-in this museum, and seeing this art is amazing. How...I-I just wonder all—I'm not an artist--,

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

JS: Mhmm.

MS: But I've, y'know, I've taken kids to Africa before; to Ghana. And the only thing that got the kids to understand--youth, to understand; not just kids, youth--to understand each other, was either art or sport. So you guys being artists, have you seen—I mean, I've seen art that brings people together. I've seen your art, Johnson, that brought some people together, and a couple other things. But, it's amazing how this-this art here, even though it's sad, but at the same time it teaches. It's amazing how this art brings people together.

JS: Um, I got a question for you, Martin.

MS: Yeah.

JS: When you took the kids from America to Africa, when they came back, how did it change up their worldview?

[Crosstalk]

MS: Oh oh oh...

JS: Did they--,

MS: And that's the reason I did it.

JS: Open their—Yeah.

[Crosstalk Ends]

MS: I did it—I took some kids to Ghana, and I-I-I did it so they can see what they are missing.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: What they are missing sp-spiritually. What they are missing when it comes to their education. Some of the kids in my community in Harlem did not know where Egypt was. They watched the Ten Commandments on TV and they thought it was in Europe. Right? When they found out that—I didn't even know where it was until I went to the military.

JS: Oh whoah.

MS: Really? And that's—that's how, eh—that's how crazy it was. So that's why I decided to take some youth to Ghana, um, ah years ago. We went out there, we looked around. How did they—The question was, is how did they feel about it? Uh, how they uh... [Pause] They uh, understood how important it was to be an American, number one. Then they really understood the Middle Passage, because we went to a place called Elmina Castle, and they showed their lynchings, and what we had to go through for 400 years of slavery in Cape Coast in Ghana. So it-when we came back, they really understood, you know, where they come from. But you don't have to go all the way; You can go to West Virginia. You can go to Appalachian Mountains, and you can see the crazy stuff. But what's-what's good about it, is that you can see--if you go to Appalachian Mountains, or you go to West Virginia--you can actually see white people having less than what we have. Much, much less, because there's more poor white people than there are Black people. So when we take them to those areas, which I've done, and we have them have their own welfare cards, we take them to those areas and we-we show the difference. You're still the same, even though you're white and

you're Black, you still have the same welfare cards, you still have the same um.
whatever SNAP benefits--.

CJ: Yeah.

MS: But you—These white people don't have water, and you have Air Jordans.

CJ: Yes.

MS: So it got to show, you know, what the different—It helped them understand that some of the things that have been presented to them are not the truth, in this country.

CJ: Mhmm.

JS: For example, I could take from my point of view as a Haitian immigrant family--,

MS: Uh-huh.

JS: And-and and becoming the first generation to come to America.

MS: Yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

JS: So, when I frame the first five years of my life in-in Haiti, because of my disability, I wasn't able to go to school in Haiti. And then when I came to America, I saw all the wonderful privilege I have now. If we--,

[Crosstalk]

MS: Mm. So you--because of your disability, Johnson--you couldn't-you couldn't really go to school in Haiti?

JS: I couldn't walk; I used to crawl.

MS: Oh.

JS: So there wasn't equipment, you know. Haitian is like a third-world country. If you have a disability...ah-you, a you all know.

MS: You [Inaudible - 00:16:10] there. You just...yeah. You don't get no help.
[Chuckles] Right.

JS: You all know. You're not able to give to the society, 'cause it's already a poor country.

MS: Right.

JS: So when I came to America when I was five years old in-in 1995--,

MS: Right.

JS: I saw all the things that I had access to, and I became really grateful, 'cause I was like, 'Oh my goodness.'

MS: Because of that.

JS: If-if my parents did not work hard for me to come to America, if I was still in Haiti--,

MS: Right.

JS: If-if my parents did not work hard for me to come to America, if I was still in Haiti, I was gon' be dead. I was gon' be like a vegetable.

MS: Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

JS: You know?

MS: So Johnson, you came here [clears throat], you came here with a disability--,

JS: Mhmm.

MS: Right? You got here. How did you feel, though, man, about seeing--a disability or not--how did you feel about seeing stuff like en masse, like lynchings, and the racism in America coming from a country that had social problems--and had financial problems--coming to a country? Especially...did you come to Indianapolis or you went to—You've been all over the place. But you been--,

JS: West Palm Beach.

MS: West Palm? Ah, that's even—Th-that's Florida--,

JS: Y-yeah.

MS: That's even crazier.

JS: Um--,

MS: How did you feel, [Chuckles] when you got, I mean, after you started--you got older, went to college--and you started learning about all this-this Black hate. I mean, hate between Black-to against Black people; I'm sorry.

JS: Ah, you know what? That's a good question. 'Cause, you know, Haiti became the first independent country; the first Black independent country.

MS: Yeah. Mhmm.

JS: So there wasn't no slavery, but because we [Inaudible - 00:17:56] to be an independent country, we didn't have no riches. And that's one-one of the reasons why Haiti is one of the poorest countries there--.

CJ: Mhmm.

MS: Right, right.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

JS: Or, Or you want to be a-a free country, we're not going to give you no
[Inaudible - 00:18:12].

CJ: Mm mm, it-right.

MS: Oh 'We not gonna give you back,' right?

JS: So even though they became the first, Black independent countries, because they didn't have no [Inaudible - 00:18:23-00:18:24], that's one of the reasons why Haiti is like a third-world country.

MS: Yeah. Haiti. Right right.

JS: It-it is amazing when I came to America, like...I gotta tell you, I went over from Haiti as a five year-old; I never seen a white--,

MS: Oh, you never saw a white person in Haiti, when you were five years old?

JS: I never saw one.

CJ: [Chuckles]

MS: Right.

JS: So, it was all new when I came to the airport. I'm like, 'Oh my goodness.'

[Laughter]

JS: I never seen a...So, a-but, even though when I came to America there was more privilege, but then again I do see the segregation between immigrant, or even African, or being a different skin color.

MS: Right, right, right, right.

JS: There are a lot of disadvantages.

MS: Yeah, yeah. But the hate, I mean--,

JS: Mhmm.

MS: I-I-did-I, you know? Not-not to totally interrupt, but I want to ask your son--,

CJ: [Laughs]

JS: [Chuckles]

MS: Right, and you got to speak up a little bit eventually.

JS: Yeah.

[Crosstalk Ends]

MS: Have you experienced racism, and hate in any form? Because you were saying earlier that you know, we were talking about how we separate from each other--from any white people; any people that, not even just white people--just people that aren't African American towards you.

[Pause]

MJ: I can't really think of a time I personally experienced racism, but I haven't seen it, you know, happen in the world.

MS: H-how have you seen it? Where-where'd you see it at?

MJ: Kinda, in the systems that oppressed Black people currently--,

MS: Uh-huh.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MJ: Like, in America, such as red-lining, [Pause] um...really all types of disadvantages just to living as a Black person. But, at the same time, my mom has showed me that it can also be a advantage, 'cause you have the Black community to rely on.

MS: How do you think we could fix it though? [Pause] As- 'cause, you know, young people, you guys got the-the the answers. How do you think that we could kinda, I mean...wh-how do you feel about the vote?

[Pause]

MJ: At times, it seems kind of rigged, as white people have a lot of the money, so they can control more. And they have more access to things, such a-like, the--what's it called?--lobbying.

MS: Mhmm, mhmm.

MJ: They can basically buy lawmakers, and they give them expensive vacations and all these things, so they can rig the laws against us more. So I feel like we may need--what's it called?--not reparations, but--...

MS: Yeah, we need reparations too. [Laughs]

MJ: Correct.

CJ: That too.

[Laughter]

MJ: Um, like reform--,

MS: Mm.

MJ: In our law system.

MS: Mhmm mhmm. How do-how do other—I'm just curious, 'cause I heard a kid yesterday tell me that he's not votin', and then he said that--and he had seen this exhibit--and he says that he thinks that this can happen again. But he-I told him, 'Well, you know, you need to get the vote to get the right.' He was like, he's not votin' because

he feels that, you know, it's not fair. And then he brought up that Donald Trump was the best president--this is a young Black kid in the hood--was the best president in the United States. Now, I understand him; let me tell you why I understand him. I understand him because he thought that the stimulus checks that came through during COVID, came directly from Donald Trump. Right? Because he signed them. Donald Trump hold those checks so he could sign those checks to make it—It was a marketing scheme. Right? But the checks come from Congress; they don't come from Donald Trump.

JS: Yeah.

MS: So my question's Civics. Do you think that youth should learn more about how the system works? Civics. How-how-how...And do you think that'll help them, try to understand the system, the American system?

MJ: I do think it would really help if more young people knew about the systems in place, 'cause-because of the internet, we have more communication between each other than we ever have. So, I feel if we could raise our voices enough, we definitely could change things.

MS: That's a good ques-that's a good answer. That's a good answer. I mean, I-I think that things have changed. Some people don't think that things have changed. I mean, we could take our art, and we could put it on the walls, and nobody's tearing them down like they used to. We can, you know walk freely and not worried about being snatched up in the street, by some, you know...But our democracy is fragile right now.

JS: Mm, mhmm.

CJ: Yeah.

[Pause]

CJ: I'm thinking.

[Crosstalk]

MS: I know. [Laughs]

JS: [Laughs]

CJ: Like my wheels are spinning. 'Cause--,

MS: Hell, we just havin' conversation.

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

CJ: I was always, right, like a big whiz--especially in my youth, and then I'm kind of comin' back to it now in my adulthood--but I was um, really civically engaged. Um, and I was a fan of like um, history and politics in school. Because I wanted to know how things actually worked. And I think a lot, like--like my son said--they have a way to talk to each other that we've never had before. But it's about harnessing that, to-and using it to actually work on the way things actually work. There's a lot of like screening on the internet, but I don't know if that's how we change laws. I think we need to organize, and be um, and have a more, um [pause] like to narrow our focus on things that can actually like help us in the long term. I think we spend a lot of energy, kind of like 'feeling things,'

MS: Right.

CJ: And that doesn't always turn into results. And I think that, like right, some of our, mm--I hesitate to even call, "opposition"--'cause I feel like there're people who need

to be bright in, and like re, re-taught. But like, people who are supporting Trump, that's because they don't know how it works.

MS: Right right right.

CJ: They-they saw his name on the check, and they were like, 'Trump givin' me the "stimmys;" I love it.'

[Laughter]

CJ: [Laughs] Like they're-the-they're--,

[Crosstalk]

MS: They don't know.

CJ: They're gonna flip it--,

JS: Yeah.

CJ: They're gonna live good--.

MS: Right.

CJ: For maybe up to six months, and then they was "on." They're-they're Trump supporters. But, if you understood that that money came from Congress, and that you're represented in the Congress by y'know, your congressman. Um [Laughs]--...

MS: Yeah, yeah yeah yeah.

JS: [Chuckles]

CJ: And state representatives, then you'd know who actually gave you that money; that his name is on it, but, right, it's just a brand name label. That's not who made the sausage.

MS: Right right right.

CJ: And that the people who make the sausage are accountable to you, and you can cajole them if they want to stay in office--.

MS: You got to hold their feet to the fire.

CJ: You can write letters. You can hoot and hollerin'.

MS: Right, You got to hold their feet—Right.

CJ: Like, we can do all the things so that person, who actually has their roots in your, you know, congressional district or whatever. [Laughs]

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: Yeah, did you hear what happened? Did you guys hear what happened in Louisiana this weekend?

CJ: Mm-mm.

MS: They—you know they had the election for the governor; they—they haven't had a Dem-uh Republican governor in a while. Uh, I think there's nine-hundred thousand Black people in Louisiana--,

JS: Damn.

MS: Only twenty-one thousand came out to vote, and they lost the election, to this-this Trump-supporter guy. Now, it's super import-it's-it's super important that we need to come out and vote locally--like for our little representatives, for our chiefs, uh for our law makers--but we don't know what the system is. And I'm not saying anything bad against our people--or what our people--but we need to—Like organizations like *BLT*, need to come into the communities more. Organizations like *Urban League*--or

whatever it is--need to come in, and then go into the hood, and actually go into the hood and actually do stuff like that. So lynchings and stuff like that doesn't happen anymore. You know, that's just my opinion. You know?

JS: I think one of the biggest things we have in to-day's society--especially in the Black community--if you think about the honorable Martin Luther King, everybody had agreement and they were un...and they worked together.

MS: Right right.

JS: For them, uh, they said, 'You know what? If they, if they want us to sit in the back of the bus, we ain't gonna ride the bus.

[Crosstalk]

MS: [Laughs] Right, right, right, right.

JS: So everybody ride the bus--,

MS: Mhmm Mhmm.

JS: And they saw the impact.

MS: Yeah.

JS: So we've forced them to change the law.

MS: Mhmm.

JS: We uh-Black people staying together today, and helping that community--,

CJ: Mhmm.

JS: Are still fightin' each other--,

MS: Right.

JS: Or tryin' to build each other's ego-ego, but work together--the same thing happened during the Martin Luther King era.

MSL Yeah.

JS: It would be way more easy today with the technology.

MS: But nobody's stepping up. I mean, the-the—What happened to the-to..? 'Cause in Martin Luther King's era, started in the mosques and the churches and the synagogues.

JS: Mhmm.

MS: We don't have that anymore. We don't have that like we used to. So it's it's--,

JS: Yeah.

MS: And then we're human. And that's the issue--,

JS: [Laughs]

MS: Because we're human. And we-we we do some cra—Human beings do some crazy stuff. You see what's going on in Israel with the Hamas and--,

JS: Yeah.

MS: You know, all in Palestine and then people are picking sides as human beings.

JS: Uh huh.

CJ: Mhmm.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: So it's kinda-it's kinda hard. I just-I'm just glad at the work that I see in this museum.

JS: Mhmm.

MS: I'm glad um, uh at the work that we're doing collectively, the little bit of work that we're doing. I say little bit 'cause we—There's a lot of stuff we got to do.

JS: [Chuckles]

CJ: Oh man.

MS: There's a lot of stuff we got to do.

JS: That's...

CJ: [Chuckles] So many things.

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: It's not...I mean, we had Obama in office, and and [Exhales] nothing really, really changed. I'm not saying that he, you know, was the savior of savers, but just like with Louisiana now. If something goes wrong--if some kid gets shot, God forbid, in Louisiana--or something happens in Louisiana tomorrow, what are you going to do? Our community is going to stand up and say, 'We need, we need Al Sharpton here. We need Crump here.' But what happened when we were supposed to be votin' ? To vote these people out of office, that are killin' our children?

[Crosstalk]

JS: It's going to be people [Inaudible - 00:29:07].

MS: Right.

JS: It's going to be, 'Yeah do this.' And then, a couple years in, it-it d...it d, it die, it die out.

MS: Yeah, that's right. And then-and then--,

JS: C'mon...

MS: But-and—That doesn't happen in other communities. It doesn't happen...Jersey City--you know, I'm from New York.

CJ: Mhmm.

JS: Mhmm.

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: Jersey City, uh was usually, at—There was a part of Jersey City that was mostly Italian. Now it's all Eastern Indian.

JS: Whoa.

MS: Because they voted and they put an Eastern Indian governor--I mean, not a governor--a-a mayor in their office, and they are killing the game right now in their community. So, you know, you've got Eastern Indians come here, they haven't been here in a while, and we've been here for over four hundred years--,

[Crosstalk]

JS: That's the--,

MS: Two hundred years or whatever it is.

JS: That's the problem. We are not supporting each other.

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: We don't support each other and that's the thing. So that's why we need exhibits like this, to continue to show us, I mean...I'll give-I'll-I'll give a quick story real quick. I was in New York at a museum and I took my daughters to ah—They were young. They were eight, nine and I think twelve. And took them to a lynching exhibit; I was telling Dr. Lichtenstein about this. I-I-I uh took 'em to a uh-a lynching exhibit where they had all these photographs and these artists of lynching, like true lynchings. It was in a [the] middle of the city. I took them in there and as I was walking around, I saw a whole Hasidic--a whole bunch of Hasidic Jewish families--and they were looking at the stuff. So right before I left, the curator came to me, and said to me, 'What's wrong with you? I said, 'What do you mean?' She said, 'Why you bringing your children into this exhibit?'

JS: What do you mean?

MS: I said, 'What do you mean?' I said, 'They need to learn.' And then I-I stopped for a minute and I said, 'Have you asked those Hasidic families, that Hasidic family that came in with their children? Why are you asking me? Do you not...You're the curator; you're the person that put this out. Do you not want us to see what happened to us, and others to see what happened to us? Do you not want my daughters and my children to know what's going on? Why would you ask me that?' That hurt me, and that kind of fueled me to come to exhibits like this, and to look at art that Black people make. Uh you know? It's-it's, It's just amazing. That's just a little story.

JS: I-I can't believe she asked you that question. [Laughs]

[Laughter]

CJ: "So why are you here?"

[Crosstalk]

JS: Well..

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

CJ: I mean I think we encounter things like that a lot though, that idea that we should protect children from their own history. That it will upset them. But shouldn't they be upset, and then learn how to deal with it? You know? And I think that's, like--to kinda try and bring it back locally--Indianapolis, because of its history with the Klan--,

MS: Right.

CJ: Is the perfect place to stage that kind of thing.

MS: Yes yes, yes.

CJ: And then, like right. The other thing we have here, that--besides like a history of the Ku Klux Klan involvement-- is a strong faith-based community. So I think we have like, the perfect grounds to plant those seeds now. To like, do the next phase of, like MLK's work and things like that. Because, it is a place with that kind of history, and so it's the perfect place to reckon with that history. So that's how--that goes back to one of the first questions we started talking about on the record--is like, how does this school, and its history with the Klan connect...um, like how you take that and turn it into gold? It's by constantly confronting those things. It's by taking your children to a [an] anti-lynching exhibit. It's by me bringing my son here, and getting him involved in this conversation. Because like one day, my time to do the work will be over, and it'll be in his hands--or in your daughter's hands--and they have to know, so that they can

confront, so that they're not...so that they don't think that the stimulus check comes from Donald Trump.

MS: Right.

CJ: They have to know how things actually work, and how things actually happen, so that they're not just out here walking blind. You can't exist in the world like that. I mean you can, but it doesn't help us go forward at all. [Laughs]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: It doesn't. And-and-and, and and and what-what hurts us also--I was just...--what hurts us also, is our class. You know, you have-you know, you have people like Jay-Z. Then you have people like, uh um, um uh I forgot, this-this rapper, she's from the South. Young rapper, and she's also said that she was with Trump, and she got ridiculed with that. But she didn't know about what we were talking about, when it came to the stimulus check. So when it comes to class inside the Black community, I mean--and I know, yo you from Haiti. So I know you know about the class, the bourgeoisie, and all that stuff, right?--but in-in, we as African Americans, even though we're starting to acquire money and wealth in all types of places, you know, sometimes we put each other down.

CJ: Mm.

JS: Yeah.

MS: We don't support each other. Once we get to that-and, once we get to that level, we don't support each other when it comes to talking about the vote.

JS: It's almost like a competition for them. If-if you leave your community, you go to school, and then you come back, everybody sees you different--.

[Crosstalk]

MS: Yeah.

JS: 'Oh--,'

MS: They-they

JS: 'You--,'

MS: 'Oh, you-you think you're better than me 'cause you went to school'--,

JS: 'Oh, you think you're be...' Oh...

MS: And then-and then the other way around, 'Yeah I went to school, and you're stupid.'

JS: Um, but...

CJ: [Chuckles] Yeah.

MS: You know they do it both ways.

CJ: It goes both ways.

JS: [Laughs] Yeah.

MS: We fight, we fight, we in a fight.

JS: Yeah. It's like, there's no competition. 'I'm still the same person I am...'

MS: I was when I left.

JS: 'Why do you see me different now? Is it a competition to you, or are you feeling bad 'cause you didn't do it?'

MS: So why do we see them different when we come back? Like if we come back from—If we got all the degrees, if we have everything, or we went to the military, we were heroes--,

JS: It's pride.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: And if we come back to the hood, and then we say that they're talking nonsense, so why do we feel that way? Why do we feel that way towards our own, when we come back to school? And that-that separates us also; When we can't-when we can't come to a common ground and tell people that think that Donald Trump or whatever, you can have your own opinion. 'Cause remember back in the day when I was young, you couldn't speak about your political.

[Laughter]

MS: You couldn't say if you were a Democrat, or you couldn't say if you were Republican.

JS: It was awesome.

MS: I'm-I'm-I'm older; I'm fifty-nine years old. So it's-it's, you know, it's different. But how do we tell people? How do we—How we telling...How do we communicate to each other, 'Alright, alright, let me educate you, when it comes to civics. Let me tell you that Congress puts this in not Donald Trump.'? I mean, how do we tell our-our youth, 'No, don't shoot each other today. Don't kill each other. Let's not—Let's go to the museum, and check out these different exhibits. Let's...' How do you bring your art into communities, where people will become, and start doing art, and making things change through art and sport and...? You know? How do we do things like that? It's a hard question, but...

JS: It's all about their support. Support.

MS: Support.

CJ: Support.

MS: Mm. Support. Money too.

JS: [Chuckles]

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

CJ: Money, and it...Like, part of me is like, there's [there] needs to be structural change, so we need to like, 'Go get that money.' And right, be lobbying and doin' like that type of level stuff. But also as I've been like kind of, doing storytelling--and some of the other programs I got involved in over the last year--it's really, it's a combination of those top level things, but also you need, right...Like, you need to be able to have someone in community who's gonna grab kids who don't have have parents who bring 'em to stuff like this, and bring 'em. You need somebody who gonna go to...who right, an educated brotha, who's going to keep going to his same barbershop he's always went to--,

[Crosstalk]

MS: Yeah yeah. [Chuckles]

CJ: And when somebody's wrong, he's going to calmly explain why they're wrong.

MS: Right right.

CJ: And...[Laughs]

MS: Yeah. [Laughs]

CJ: Like, You know, on a variety of topics, ranging from politics to women's issues. Like, we have to have somebody in those spaces, who can speak people's language where they are. And sometimes that's your pastor. Sometimes it's you know, your friend who "made good," and went to university.

MS: Yeah.

CJ: Sometimes it's a, you know...It can be whoever. An auntie who runs her own business--.

MS: It's-It's the guy who just came out of jail in the hood--,

CJ: Yeah.

MS: But got-got understands him, ah the community better than what we would have, since we left.

CJ: Exactly.

MS: Right.

CJ: Like somebody who's been there um, and then just being able to have conversations. You know, not necessarily like this; this is a little um...this is wonderful, but it's not the um, [Inaudible - 00:37:36]. Yeah. [Pause] Um, but it has to have been--like where, right--where people feel really truly comfortable. It has to be like um, what's that-that idea of like havin' closed conversation--?

MS: Mhmm mhmm.

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

JS: Like, 'This not for them; this is for us to get ourselves all on one accord.'

That, that concept needs to come back. Those like, closed conversation, where we get together, and we decide what it is.

MS: Right.

CJ: And this is what we're goin' [Chuckles] to go out into the world and present, um but like right, without squashing people's like individuality and stuff.

MS: Yeah. Mhmm.

CJ: But yeah, somebody has to be there to like, get 'em together. Um, [Laughs].

MS: Yeah, and let 'em know what's goin' on.

JS: I think a [Inaudible - 00:38:15] a biggest problem, is occasional agreement and disagreement--,

MS: Yes.

JS: But the thing is, when you have a disagreement, some people say, 'Oh, I'm never going to talk with that person again.'

[Speakers intermittently agree]

JS: No. You can't do that. Even though you have different point of view--and maybe if you-if you keep that friendship, and you don't have a better understanding--,

MS: Yes.

JS: You say, 'You know what? Let me see it from your point of view.' And then, if I could go from it, or, you know, I could stick with what I know, but you can't erase somebody out your circle, based on one thing.

MS: Right.

JS: And then they--...

MS: You can't. [Pause] I think we all at this table--I think that it all starts, and I'm going to say it. I think that it all comes out, and all is based on everything that we're talking about at this table--it's based in this thought of white Supremacy.

CJ: Mhmm.

MS: Now, I don't know if everybody agrees with this at the table, but I agree that there is a system of white supremacy around the world, coming out of America.

JS: Mhmm.

MS: Now, I say it because people like Hitler based his whole speech and Mein Kampf--,

CJ: Mhmm.

MS: Based his whole movement on how we did it here.

JS: Mm.

MS: Now, I'm not-I'm not sayin' it in a way to be—Because you know, [Pause] I think that white supremacy is a construct.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: I think that it's-it, because with-we see the lynchings that's happened; we see what's going on. I think that it's a whole...I-I don't know if you've ever heard of something called Bacon's Rebellion? You know about Bacon's Rebellion? And that's where the “white” started. There was no such thing before Bacon's Rebellion as something white. There was, there-you know, you had indentured servants, you had stuff like that, but there was nothing—And you had the Frontier. So everybody had to

get along when they would come into the country, and they were running from places and, you know...if anybody wants to look at Bacon's Rebellion, you can tell your mother, you can teach your mother about Bacon's Rebellion. [Laughs]

[Laughter]

MS: But-but, it's amazing, and I think that if white people would get a hold on the white supremacy, and change the way that other white people think--like Alex is, Dr. Alex, Lichtenstein is doin', like my wife Jennifer Robinson-Pace, who's the CEO of the Indianapolis Children's Museum--if people would start standing up and doing things, I think it would change.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

We come together--just white and Black--I think it would change the way that everyone thinks about us, and the way that we think about them, and then we could live in a beautiful artsy fartsy world. [Laughs]

[Laughter]

CJ: In my dreams. We "Kumbaya" and live in an artsy fartsy world.

[Laughter]

JS: "Kumbaya."

[Laughter]

JS: Yeah.

CJ: Yeah.

MS: I-I mean, I-I-I just think that we all agree that that's one of the biggest--I agree--I think-I know that's one of the biggest problems in this world, is how you know,

colonialism just destroyed people's lives, people's spirit. They did it through--I'm a Christian, I believe in God, I'm convinced--,

[Crosstalk]

JS: Me too.

MS: But they did it through religion--,

JS: Yeah.

MS: And all sides.

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: You know, remember ba-before, euh-you know the Moors? They were all colors. They were doing craziness too. But I just-I just think that it could be helped a little more if we let more white Americans--that construct--that white Americans come and actually help us, and they should speak more like we do. You know? Don't be afraid. No matter who you—If you're a Republican and you like Trump, don't be afraid to stand up and say the truth. He's a criminal.

CJ: Yeah.

MS: He's in a lot of trouble right now. [Chuckles]

JS: Some people, they don't want to hear the truth.

[Crosstalk]

CJ: 'I got played.'

MS: No, democracy is no joke.

[Pause]

CJ: Ye-we're about to run out of time--,

MS: Yeah, go.

CJ: But like, that's such an interesting idea. Like-but I think that people don't come out, and say you-like, that he's a criminal, because then that, that crumbles their identity. Like, you know what I mean--?

MS: Ooh.

[Crosstalk Ends]

CJ: Like if you poke, if you poke one thing, you gon'-that's means you pokin' another.

MS: Ooh, hoo-hoo.

CJ: Like, b-that's...we-they came and showed us the "ten minutes" sign.

MS: Right. [Laughs] So we can't talk [Inaudible - 00:42:51]

[Laughter]

MS: No but you're right.

CJ: Yeah.

MS: You're right. Eh-you're right. You're right. You're a hundred percent right. I didn't think about it like that.

CJ: Yeah um--,

MS: Yes, it's-it's bad.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: Yeah, it's bad Because, you know, even if you don't believe that—Even if you believe he's innocent, he is the most indicted man in the whole entire world; not in

the United States. And the thing about it is that, say, he didn't do a hundred and...he did...if-if he got indicted a hundred and twenty times, there's got to be two or three times that he did something bad.

CJ: [Laughs]

MS: And you know they're flipping on him now.

CJ: Yeah.

[Crosstalk]

UNKNOWN SPEAKER [coming into the conversation]: Yeah. Um--,

MS: They're flipping on him now. Hi. [Laughs]

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: So, I'mma just-I meant to bring a picture of my son to show you 'cause, 'cause I had to look twice.

MS: [Laughs] You thought, you thought I was him?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I had to look twice brotha.

[Laughter]

MS: We the same age now. I don't know.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I don't know. I'm seventy.

[Pause]

MS: It don't crack.

CJ: I swear...right? Yeah.

MS: I hope y'all didn't get that on mic.

JS: It don't crack.

MS: Huh, I'm-I'm fifty-nine. Damn, seventy?

JS: Seventy?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I mean, fifty-nine brotha, c'mon.

MS: Hold up.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: C'mon.

MS: Aw, brother.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: We blessed.

MS: Whoo. Glad to be blessed.

JS: Seventy now.

CJ: [Chuckles]

[Laughter]

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I-look, I still play ball too.

JS: Wow.

MS: Oh, you do? Yeah, but you look like you play some ball though.

JS: [Chuckles]

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: You know, I don't know how well.

MS: You don't dunk anymore. You dunk?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Ah-huh, I never [Inaudible - 00:43:59-00:44:00].

[Laughter]

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Never [Inaudible - 00:44:01]. Last time I-Last time I dunked, I was sixty-two.

MS: Oh, see, that's good.

CJ: Mm.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: In a-in a-in a-in a-in a league game.

MS: Then you came down to knees.

JS: [Chuckles]

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: And...

MS: You felt it in the knees, right? But I feel it in my knees sometimes.

JS: Euhh...

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Y'all look--,

JS: "My back..." [Making a sound effect like a crash]

MS: [Chuckles]

CJ: Oh you...[Chuckles]

MS: "Boom, bam. Oh man."

[Laughter]

MS: "Oh that's not gonna happen again."

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Yup

JS: "My back." [Chuckles]

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I'll be in touch with you.

MS: Yeah I'm around, I'm around.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: You too queen.

CJ: Okay.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Alright.

CJ: Thank you.

MS: God bless.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Alright. Bless you.

MS: [Laughs] [Pause] Alright. Does--are we finished? Yeah I guess we are.

CJ: I think that's it.

MS: Yeah.

CJ: Yeah.

[Pause]

MS: People still talkin'.

CJ: Yeah.

JS: That was a good conversation, we had.

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: Yeah. But I-I agree with you with that when it comes to Trump. Because let me tell you, they're flippin' on him. All his people, all his people are flippin' on him now. One guy just plead it-plead guilty, so he doesn't have to do a lot of time; They're flipping on him. So he's going to do some time. But if he's voted in--Biden...you know--I-I want him, because I want my student loan--my daughter's student loans taken away...

[Crosstalk]

JS: Yeah but...[Sighs]

MS: He's terrible, too, but--,

CJ: [Laughs] He's terrible too.

JS: There's a whole different story...

MS: But that's because—I'm going to blame it on y'all young people; y'all got to vote, man. Y'all got to vote. Y'all gotta--,

JS: I don't know.

CJ: Tell your college buddies to get out there and vote.

MS: You got to tell your college buddies, 'Yo...'

JS: Man...

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: Even though you might sound crazy to them, they'll look at you, and they'll come. I guarantee you, two or three of them gon' come back to you and say, 'W-what you talkin' 'bout? Why you want...What you talking about to vote for?' And even if you don't like it, you could say, 'This is...I don't like to vote.' But it sets the tone--,

JS: Yeah.

MS: To talk, because this count—There's something called democracy, that allows you to have those earphones on. And there's countries where you cannot walk around with them earphones; Your mom can't walk around with her hair like that. She can't drive. There's certain foods that you can't eat. I've been a lot of places around the world. And democracy--and you know--,

[Crosstalk]

JS: Yeah, you can't help.

MS: Democracy is no joke. We need to keep it, man. I be a...

JS: You can't have a phone, or any technology.

MS: Oh, you can't [Inaudible - 00:45:53] it now. Now, you walk down the street, if-if we lose our democracy--,

JS: In China? Oh...

MS: The first person they'd—The first people don't [they'd] come after us.

JS: Mhmm. [Chuckles]

CJ: Mhmm.

MS: I don't care. It could be everybody. And I'm not—I'm not saying "Woe is me." But what I'm saying is that, that's the history of the world. The darker you are, the more they gon' come after you. [Pause] I mean, I got family from New York. My father was born...My father's father was—I--he had a suit on, back in the 1930s--and I was like, 'Yo, why's my father-my grand-great-grandfather got a suit on?' And he was--my family is ah-Arab, his side of the family was Arab and Moroccan--but they gave him a job as a marshal. So what they would do is they would kick that; They would put the Black people in front so you would kick down the door, so you would get shot first before everybody else.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: But I was all, you know, and-and—That side of my family is so proud, that that side of the family was Arab Moroccan. But they don't talk a lot about my mother's side of the family; it was African American. You know I'm sayin'? And this is great, great, great, great. So I'm African American, straight up. But my mom--and Appalachian Mountains--they don't talk about that. So it goes to show you the whole line of the level--,

[Crosstalk]

JS: Of course...

MS: That they continue to-to-to put up—The the lighter you are...If you're not from here, if you're not from there--,

JS: I think you--,

MS: Straight towards the African Americans. Straight.

JS: Straight towards. It's all bec...It becomes, 'How dark is your skin?'

MS: Yeah. Right.

JS: 'Or, I'm supposed to be...your skin.' What? [Chuckles] But if that [Inaudible - 00:47:28], why is it gotta be a different tone?

MS: What? [Pause]

CJ: Mm.

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: I don't know. I-I-that's-that's what I'm saying. I mean, you look at the--you go into that thing and you see them--you see the-the-the the unmasked? And you see how that guy is pointing at the dead body of the Black person hangin'? Look at their faces. They used to...but before...the one over here. The one, yeah, that one. That's a—They used to be a party.

CJ: [Chuckles] Oh, the-that picture, that that's from?

MS: Mhmm.

CJ: And it's—Right, um. Where was I at yesterday, and they was talkin' 'bout that picture? Oh I was at Indiana Landmarks [Indiana Landmarks Campus/Center] takin' a class.

MS: Mhmm.

CJ: Um, tch. They started to—Instead of showing the entire picture, where you know it's like a sea of white people having a picnic--?

[Crosstalk]

MS: Uh huh.

JS: Mm.

MS: Big children?

CJ: [Chuckles] Children--,

MS: Yup.

CJ: Married couples--,

JS: Were they kids? Wow.

CJ: You know you can identify, all types of different people, like—And they're altogether under this like, lynching, like having a party.

MS: Mhmm mhmm mhmm.

CJ: And they've started to shrink it, so there's less and less of the photo shown--,

MS: Right.

CJ: So that it makes it look like it's only "these certain white people who were involved."

JS: Wow. Wow.

CJ You know, when really it's like, their entire town.

MS: Yeah.

CJ: [Laughter]

MS: Because, because--,

JS: Wow.

[Crosstalk Ends]

MS: They used to advertise it. Like 'Today, we're going to lynch Martin Small um, for winking, or for-for sitting next to a white woman. Today, we're...' And everybody—And they would-people would travel from all over. And then, after they killed you--you know what they used to do--they used to take souvenirs.

CJ: Yeah. Take little pieces of you.

MS: So they'd take your knuckles and put them in--this is...you can Goo-Google this--put it in Macy's, or in Bloomingdale's, In the window. [Pause] Ty Cobb--the-the catcher for the Yankees--used to have a lynching rope in his pocket for good luck, and used to kiss it every time he went to catch the ball..

[Crosstalk]

JS: People don't wanna hear that; this is what we need to talk...

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MS: protect our lives, and to keep my degree.' You don't want to go to college and get a degree, and then all of a sudden they say, 'Oh, you can't really get no job right now. You got to go clean out the toilet.' And you're like, 'What? Whatchu talkin' 'bout?'

And that's what happened to a lot of your ancestors, less than fifty years ago.

They-they-they came out a good school—The only...I-I remember reading about the school; I remember reading that there were teachers coming out of Yale that couldn't get jobs. So they gave them the job here at Crispus Attucks. And that's why the school just grew and blew up. But the-the-the, but the point of the matter is-is that, it can repeat. That's why you always hear the Jews always talking about the Holocaust. Because they don't—They like, 'Yo, we aint...' That's why they got the stro-the fourth strongest army in the world, and they got their own land; it's oil and strategic. But the fourth strongest army in the world, 'cause they don't want to go back. They don't want to go back. Oh...

KEONDRA BILLS FREEMYN: Is that a natural place to end your-end your comment? [Laughs]

MS: Yeah. [Laughs]

[Laughter]

MS: 'They don't want to go back.'

KBF: [Laughs]

JS: 'They don't want to go. No.'

CJ: Back. [Laughs]

KBF: [Laughs]

MS: This is great.

KBF: Great. I hope y'all had a good discussion.

MS: No we did.

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JS: Yeah. We did.

KBF: All right. I have to add a few things to your recording, and then y'all set.

[Pause] [Sound of mic movement] This is keondra bills freemyn. Today is October 21st, 2023. This is People's Table number two, Crispus Attucks Museum. All right.

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by C. BAY MILIN 04/26/2024

To be copyedited.