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Participants:
CLETE HASSAN LADD
ELIZABETH MITCHELL
JENNIFER PACE ROBINSON
PATRICIA PAYNE
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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 SCARLATO: Here we go. Looking good.

CLETE HASSAN LADD: Where's—your husband over here?

JENNIFER PACE ROBINSON: My husband's over there.

CL: Okay, uh, um—

AS: I'm so sorry to interrupt. I just want to tell you that we are recording now.

EM: Okay.

PP: Okay.

CL: [Clears throat]

AS: So, you can start shuffling those cards if you like, and when you decide to answer one, just speak into the mic, don't touch the mics, and give me your name a couple of times, and you're good to go. You don't have to answer them all. Hm?

CL: Do we turn it? Do we turn the mic.

AS: Nope, don't touch them.

EM: She said don't touch them.

AS: Yep [Laughs]

CL: Okay.

EM: Let's start off by introducing ourselves.

CL: So, he, he, he reminds me of my son.

JR: [Gasps] Oh!

CL: And I was like, I had to look at him like [inaudible 00:00:32]

PATRICIA PAYNE: [Laughs]

JR: [Laughs] That's so sweet.

CL: Well, I talked to him, I think we were somewhere else before.

PP: Hmm

JR: Yeah

CL: It may have been here at the, uh—

PP: It was probably here, that's where I met him.

JR: It was here. So you met him here. Yeah.

EM: Okay.

PP: Mhmm.

EM: Pat, you want to start off with your introduction?

PP: I am Pat Payne, um, director of the Indianapolis Public Schools, Office of Racial Equity and Inclusion.

EM: Okay.

CL: [Clears throat] I am Clete Ladd. Clete like a football cleat, but spelled C-L-E-T-E. Uh, I'm um, educator, uh, historian. I'm with the University of Phoenix College of Education. Um, and I'm also with the Indiana Council on educating students of color.

EM: I'm Elizabeth Mitchell, I'm a historian, documentarian, playwright, radio show host—everything all about African American history, sharing, researching, and preserving.

JR: I'm Jennifer Pace Robinson, with the Children's Museum of Indianapolis, and I have been an educator, exhibit developer, uh, experience curator, and my particular focus has been on difficult truths and difficult history. And elevating underheard voices.

PP: Well, Jennifer, you aren't just with the Children's Museum

JR: [Laughs]

PP: You are the CEO—

JR: But, I'm new in the job.

PP: Of the Children's Museum.

JR: The, yeah, so I [Laughs] I've been the president for two years now.

PP: President, okay.

JR: So, thank you, Dr. Payne.

EM: Well, it's so nice to meet you, um, I met a gentleman that's—I think he's over the theatre?

JR: Aaron Vons?

EM: Yes.

JR: Yes.

[JR intermittently agrees]

EM: He is with the family that had settled in the creek and I'm helping them with their cemetery and trying to clean it up. And most importantly, not to accept what they're being told that that cemetery is not theirs.

JR: Right.

EM: It is theirs. Period. But, they're trying to say that the cemetery doesn't belong to anybody. And I go, "Well, their DNA is there. Hundreds, over a hundred bodies, you can't say that." But anyway, that's the fight—

JR: Aaron.

CL: [Clears throat] Yeah.

EM: Yeah.

JR: Yeah.

EM: Yeah. So I met him and, yeah, that's great.

JR: Yeah, he's terrific.

EM: Okay.

JR: Yeah.

CL: You know Diana Daniels? His sister?

EM: I most certainly do. That's who called me to come on board. Yeah.

CL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

PP: Oh, she's the one. Yeah. Okay.

CL: Yeah.

EM: Yeah, Diana Daniels. And she and I went up to the Roberts Settlement—

PP: 'Cause she told me she was working—

EM: On my own I've been collecting dirt from all of the early Black settlements.

JR: Wow

EM: I've talked to the State Museum to get me an intern to help me collect the dirt for a permanent exhibit on all of the Black settlers— Settlements. 'Cause there were plenty of them. Ask me if anybody's taken a bite in helping me.

CL: Mm.

[Intermittent agreement]

EM: No. So, that's another fight. There's so many fights and different battles and different levels, where do you begin? I don't know. So, did you want to pick a question and go from there? You got something you wanna say, we could do that.

PP: No, I guess we do that.

EM: Okay, there you go.

PP: I'd like to continue the conversation we were having.

CL: *Discuss class and racial disparities you've experienced and/or witnessed in your community.* Um, well, I'll, I'll start. Um, when I went to high school, we had to take a test to get into Shortridge. And, to, uh, you had to score a certain amount to get into Shortridge, and I did. Uh, it was the year, uh, the same year that Father Harden and Dr. Andrew James Brown protested Shortridge. They led a protest in Shortridge because of the racial disparities and inequities. And, um, I've been involved with the the Father ever

since then. And um, the other thing was that when I went to the military, I joined the Army to get out of Indianapolis. And I was, um, after completing my training at Fort Knox, Kentucky, they sent me to Fort Harrison, back to Indianapolis. And so, uh, while I was there, uh, I was attending the Defense Information school, which is, um, next to Westpoint, one of the most classiest, uh, facilites-education facilities for the for the Defense Department. And I was walking through the library, the military history library, and saw a section: Black military history. This was in 1976. Black military history. And found out about the Six Triple Eight, the Tuskegee, the thirteen Tuskegee Airmen from here, the Montford Pointe Marines that were from here. Willoughby [inaudible 00:05:21] Brown Chapel, uh, who, uh, who helped formulate the, who had set up the um, the uh, curriculum for Tuskegee Airmen and trained over three hundred Tuskegee Airmen. And so, when I saw that, I said, "Well, why isn't this in the schools?" 'Cause it wasn't in the schools, but why is it, how come it's not in the schools, but it's in the military library? You know, so that was my, uh, experience with racial disparities.

EM: Wow. Wow, wow wow.

PP: *Discuss class and racial disparities*—I don't, like, experience it, I see it every day.

CL: See it every day

EM: Mm.

PP: Working with Black and Brown children.

EM: Even today, in 2023?

PP: Oh my God.

CL: Twenty three.

EM: Has things changed, Pat? Gotten any better?

PP: No. No, they haven't changed. And in some ways, it's getting worse.

CL: Worse. [Clears throat]

PP: You know, um, I mean, it's really crazy that you know who's gonna be at the bottom before the test is even given. But, that's the way it is, that's the way, um, we have to help our teachers understand. This is not something that you just accept and say, 'well, that's the way it's always been.' That's, uh-uh. That's why we, every single person who touches the life of a child in our school district has to go through two days of, racial equity training. Two days, nine to five. And it's not just everybody on our staff. We have community partners who go through that same training because systemic racism is shaping the outcomes of wherever they are also. So, it's, um, it, it, that's why I haven't retir—I can't even retire yet.

[Laughter]

PP: And that's the reason. Just dealing with this, I just can't allow myself to, to retire, sit back and watch TV. I mean, there's other things that I could be doing if I retire,

but I want to be on the front line. I wanna be right here, where these children are. And then you got all this craziness that, uh, like, Mindtrust and charter schools. That is a big problem. A big problem. Uh, because parents feel that they want to do whatever they can for the benefit of their children, so they think that that's for the benefit of their children. I have never been in, in favor of charter schools. I do not like that they are taking public money that should be going to traditional public schools to strengthen them. And there is still no evidence that they are doing any better than the traditional public schools. Uh, I think that's just throwing a whole 'nother wrench where we should be concentrating on getting rid of these disparities and disproportionalities. But you got all this political mess still.

EM: Has the school system done any better with hiring Black teachers? What is the ratio there?

PP: It's still a problem.

CL: [clears throat] It's still a problem, we're trying to do better. I mean, ninety percent of our teachers were white. Uh, it's dropped to—

EM: And the population of Black kids?

PP: Oh, it's about fifty-five percent, uh, Black children. And, almost twenty-five percent uh, Lat-Latinx children

CL: Latin, yeah.

EM: Okay.

PP: So, their experiences are completely different from these children.

EM: Yes.

PP: So, it's, um—

CL: And, and, and they, um, there are, the state released a report last week that they're short between thirty-three hundred and thirty-five hundred teachers.

PP: Oh yeah.

CL: And that, uh, like, states like Florida and Texas are taking anybody with a high school diploma. Uh, and Indiana is looking at ways to recruit teachers—

PP: That's—

CL: But, that is um—

PP: That is a real problem.

CL: That's defective as well—

JR: Yeah, yeah.

CL: Let me, let me use that term. That's defective as well.

PP: Yeah

CL: Um, there, there, because nobody, number one, the pay. Because, I'll, I'll give you an example. My, I'm sorry, my, um, my brother in law and I, we both took out

student loans at the same time. He got a job in engineering, he graduated from Rose-Hulman and got a job in engineering. Went to work for Navistar. I went to IPS. His salary was fifty-three thousand dollars a year. Mine was twenty-two.

PP: Mhmm

EM: There you go.

JR: Mhmm.

CL: Student loan payments the same.

EM: Yeah.

JR: Mhmm. Mhmm. Mhmm.

EM: Yeah. I just want to remind everybody, I'm looking at these tips. Please refrain from knocking on the table 'cause this is gonna pick everything up and interrupt what we're saying. So, it—I talk with my hands, so I'ma keep my hands off the table.

[Laughs]

JR: I'm rolling this piece of paper.

PP: [Laughs]

EM: And do like this [Laughs]

JR: [Laughs]

EM: Okay, sweetie, you're next.

[Intermittent agreement]

JR: Alright. This is Jennifer. Um, I would love to go back to what Clete was saying, um, how do we do a better job, how do I do a better job of representing that history that isn't in schools? Because it, I know that it's so hard to change curriculum and to bring things into a classroom, but as an informal learning organization, we can tackle some of that and so I think specifically about the Tuskegee Airmen, and I love being in this museum. Because we've got Walter Palmer and Art Carter and those are two individuals who grew up, and lived by the Children's Museum, and we've done exhibits with them, and had them in the museum and you can't deny that they're real people. And they have a history and they have a story and so, what I've seen is those instances where it's just so easy to kind of forget about big chunks of history and forget about people. I think about Oscar Robertson and he didn't get to have the parade with, um, their victory, you know? And so, tho-that's all in the past but I think that idea that some people are, that some children are not as important as other children really bothers me. And so, we're trying really hard to ha-how do you have every child who comes in the door, feel like their point of view matters. But also do more to get every child in the door. And so, part of that is a funding solution. So, not just funding the building of new exhibits, but funding—we're trying to get like a school field trip fund so that all of IPS can come for free and you don't have to worry about that. And what we can do to just, open the doors and let people in, and then we've, we'll tell, we'll partner

with people to tell the history that needs to be told. So, I've seen that, and we want to fix it.

[Intermittent agreement]

EM: Well, I grew up here. Born and raised here in Indianapolis. And I remember when the Children's Museum was free. And I don't know if I have the story correct 'cause since I've been here talking to Leon and different people, some of the stories of what I've been told have been incorrect. So this may be an incorrect story—but there were so many Black kids coming to the museum the white people were afraid to come. And they implemented, uh—

CL: Fees

EM: To come into those doors. And that mirrored what was happening with the zoo, where it was located. The Blacks would come in, [inaudible 0:13:25], park the cars, shine the cars, and white people visiting the zoos were afraid and they thought we gotta take that zoo out of Washington Park and move it. And the fees to go to the zoo here are exorbitant, where I can go right over to Illinois or anywhere near and go to a free zoo. Again, keeping certain elements out. And we pre-perceive that was to keep us out. My money's green. You don't want it, so be it. I don't have a problem. I can drive to where it's free. Um, it really bothers me, too, that the school system, like Pat said, has not changed from when I was a kid. Now, I was a kid during segregation. I lived through

it until we integrated high schools. Being a kid, it was great. It was a wonderful experience. I got taught by the best teachers that cared for me. That the community cared for me. We lived in a community among ourselves and, unbeknownst to the, to the white race, who got the wrong perception, we loved each other. We had good times. I remember going to the Indianapolis Recorder Picnics.

PP: Oh yeah. Uh-huh.

EM: I went to that. My, my father was head of one of the community centers for PAL club. That was a ball. We had a ball not being around the white race. Now, I'm not saying go back to that, I'm just saying my experiences, 'cause I wasn't an adult. I wasn't my mom and dad trying to get a job, which you wasn't gonna get. I wasn't trying to take care of a bunch of kids, which we all had six, seven, eight, nine kids, the, the parents. So, I didn't have to go through the hardships of being an adult. But that togetherness, us being together, I miss that. When I moved to Bloomington—

CL: I hope you who the [inaudible 00:15:24-00:15:25] is. We'll get back to her.

EM: It was segregated still. Breaking up, slowly but surely. This is the one thing that I witnessed. When they started hiring Blacks in some of the, uh, what do you call them? Premier, premium jobs? I don't know if it happened here, but they hired one Black individual and you had to look like you was Black. And we called ourselves The Onesies, and that's because we come in all colors. From eggshell to eggplant. Blond

hair, blue eyes, dark hair. That's what we are as a race. And so, if I was much lighter, or had different color eyes, hazel, I wouldn't get that job. 'Cause they wanted people to walk right in that door and say, 'Oh yeah, you got a Black person.' So some of the lighter-complected people in Bloomington couldn't get a job—

CL: [Clears throat]

[Intermittent agreement]

EM: And that was with Reverend Butler fighting when he left Connorsville. Came to Bloomington in 1959 and no Blacks were in, you could, I could go get a job in somebody's kitchen. That was it. The men could go sweep the floor, or be a porter. That was it. And Butler changed that under threat. Death threats. His house being burned. This was in Bloomington. This wasn't in Mississippi or Alabama, and so he was smart enough to go to all of the white churches, which, there's a bazillion of them, on every corner in Bloomington.

PP: [Laughs]

EM: And he told all the ministers, 'this is your responsibility to change the climate here.' And then, so they started hiring the first Onesies and for the first year or two, being the f-if you were the first woman on the job, it would be the same. Hard.

JR: I can imagine. Yeah.

EM: When you're the first—

PP: Yeah

EM: You gon' pay the piper.

JR: Yeah. There hasn't been a woman in charge of the Children's Museum for the past forty years.

PP: That's right.

EM: Then you know what I'm talking about. Yeah. You gonna run up, and some of them may keep it to themselves and do their little dirty work down here, but, yeah, you get it. Okay, that answers that one.

[Intermittent agreement]

CL: Let me, let me say this. Let me say this, though. Whe you're talking about, um, the Children's Museum and how they can be part of the education of Black children, uh, I do presentations on the importance of teaching local history to, to, to our children. Because when I, when I was five years old, I met Dr. Martin Luther King. Didn't realize who he was, mkay? But, none-the-less, he, he, when he came here to Saint John's Church multiple times, you know, our church was two blocks away [inaudible 00:18:05] was two blocks away. But we went. And then, just to be able to say that, uh, to, to say that when Malcom X went to Detroit, my uncle, my brother, and myself went. You know, I was six years old. You know, my brother and my uncle, they were very radical, I guess, you know. But, I , it instilled some things into me, to, to learn more about local history.

And in 1968 when Dr., when, um, uh, Robert Kennedy was, was at the park and announced Dr. King was assassinated, we were there. Our whole community was there—and the pictures that I have showed it was ninety percent of the people that were there were children. Okay? And so we, we tell that story, we share our, these stories as, as I grew up, I heard, I, I learned to listen because Arthur Carter would say, “Come over here, let me tell you something little, you know, little fella.” You know, they would talk to us on the porch. We like, we ain’t trying to hear that, we ain’t trying to hear that.” But then, fast-forward ten years from now, from ten years later, I’m reading about this brother, in the book, in books, in in, his associates in books, at Fort Harrison. And so, what we do is, we go into the nursing home and we, you know, we, we had this queen right here. She shared her story with my students. So my, my students go in and they collect oral history, but they get it directly from the historian. And then they have to transcribe it so they’re learning the writing process.

JR: That’s the way to-the learning process

PP: Yes.

CL: There you go.

JR: Well, you said St. John’s. Um so we have a new exhibit about religion—

CL: Uh huh.

PP: St. John’s is saying that.

JR: And you need to come and—

CL: St. John's, okay.

JR: 'Cause I know they called you because—

PP: Yes they did.

JR: We wanted to feature, uh, a local church 'til we, in that exhibit, we talk about St. John's Baptist Church and Reverend Brown and—

PP: That's it. Reverend Andrew J. Brown.

CL: You have, you have any pictures of him?

JR: Brown, the Reverend Brown.

EM: Mhmm.

JR: Do I-yeah, in the exhibit we do.

CL: Okay.

JR: Yeah, we have him in the—

PP: Oh, yeah.

JR: In the exhibit.

CL: I got, I got pictures, Brown, Abernathy, and, and King.

[Intermittent agreement]

JR: And they talked about King. Seeing King. And that happened right here in Indianapolis. You know? And that church, you know, we're talking about all these famous places around the world, when right—

CL: A lot of the churches—

JR: In our back y-back door, yeah.

CL: A lot of the, a lot of the pastors were opposed to it, them bringing Dr. King here.

EM: What?

[Crosstalk]

CL: A lot of the, especially a lot of the Black, a lot of the Black—

JR: Wow.

PP: Oh yeah, they were.

EM: What? The Black pastors?

CL: The Black pastors.

PP: He was, he was a troublemaker.

CL: He was a troublemaker.

JR: Oh, okay.

EM: They, they fell for the okey doke.

PP: Yeah, yeah. He was a troublemaker.

EM: And they drunk the Kool-aid.

CL: They told him, "Nah, we don't have that issue. That's down south." And Sister Marge would say "up south?"

PP: Up south. Oh yeah.

EM: [Laughs]

[Crosstalk ends]

JR: But also getting that word out, because, you know, the word that spreads is when we do the big popular exhibits. You know, the, the minecraft exhibits, and the, I don't know, the popular exhibits. But how do we get that same momentum behind like this world religion exhibit? So—

CL: Mm. Especially doing this, this, um, crisis right now. You know.

JR: Right.

PP: Oh my gosh. This is crazy.

[Intermittent agreement]

CL: We also, we also talk about Frederick Douglass because Frederick Douglass came here, at least six times. And, and the B-line railroad, which is the railroad on Massachusetts and Sherman Drive. And then the airport, The airport was, was where the drive-in be-became the drive-in. That was the airport. But, Mr. Settles was, he said

he shined Frederick Douglass shoes at, at the, at the, um, at the, um, at the railroad before he went out to, to Pendleton and got his arm broke. You know.

EM: Yeah.

JR: [Whispers] Wow.

EM: And I—

CL: You know.

EM: Just went up to Pendleton, to that marker—

CL: To that marker.

EM: And saw. He was on a flatbed truck—

CL: We got that, yeah.

EM: They drug him off that truck and beat him near to death.

JR: Frederick Douglass?

CL: Yeah. We got, we got—

EM: Yeah. And then he came back four years later.

CL: Yeah.

EM: But how I heard the story, the sheriff in Bloomington—well, he's not the sheriff now—the one sheriff, it was his family, Quakers, that saved—

PP: Oh wow

EM: And, and kept-

JR: Sa-[groans]

EM: Uh, Frederick Douglass in their home.

CL: Yeah.

EM: And to heal him and got him a doctor until he could go back to, where is he—Massachusetts, New York—

PP: Yeah.

EM: Somewhere out East. Then he came back, about four years later. But I did not know he had made nine trips here.

PP: I'm telling you, Clete, you—

[Intermittent agreement]

CL: Well, that's why the East side is named, everything over there is Frederick Douglass park, golf course, the Douglass Little League. And when, when we played Douglass Little League, we didn't know that it was Frederick—

JR: Douglass.

CL: Douglass Little League.

PP: Uh huh.

CL: And so, then we did, we did a presentation on the history of the golf course and the segregation. [Clears throat] And, and then we found out all this other information. And then Father Hardin, who portrayed Frederick Douglass—

PP: Yeah.

EM: Yes he did.

JR: Ah.

PP: Looked Just like him.

CL: He did this other, other side of research—

PP: Yeah.

CL: And pulled out all the stories and shared it with us. And, and, and it was, it was just—

PP: My gosh.

CL: So amazing. But we don't, actually we don't really appreciate how, how important our local history is.

PP: Mhmm

JR: Yeah. Do you have pictures of St. John's? Is that what you're pulling up?

CL: Uh, I've, I've got a lot of pictures, uh, um.

JR: Yeah [Laughs]

EM: Now the play that I'm putting on stage next weekend, I have a series called "Remarkable Women." And we're talking about, uh, the women's suffrage, and women's rights, everything all women in, in the Black community.

[Crosstalk]

PP: Do we only have one card to do?

EM: And there were women's clubs that sprung up all over America.

PP: These are all blank. [Shuffling cards]

EM: And—

CL: Then that's, that's what we do.

[Crosstalk ends]

EM: Madame C. J. Walker was a, was involved. I just finished a documentary about West Baden Colored Church. Those, there was a woman speaker there named Bessie Pollard that was on par with Frances Harper and Alice Dunbar-Nelson, the wife of Paul Laurence Dunbar.

PP: Mhmm.

EM: She drove up here to participate in these women's clubs and went everywhere. And I'm thinking, how did they do all that? There wasn't cell phones, there wasn't the ca—

PP: Yeah.

JR: How did they know?

EM: And they communicated and, and, just participated—

PP: They sure did.

EM: And these clubs were so successful. And they were about—

JR: Lift each other up.

PP: Oh wow.

EM: Building women's—

JR: Yeah, up, up.

EM: Self-sufficiency—

CL: And look at the children.

EM: Self-mobility, getting an education.

PP: Mhmm, just all over the place.

EM: Just empowering Black women. That's—

JR: We need that backup

PP: Oh my gosh.

EM: One of my shows next week in Bloomington.

PP: All those children.

CL: People, people don't, people don't look, see—

JR: [Gasps]

CL: We were there. If you look at it–

JR: Look at this.

CL: Ninety percent of of the people there were children. Now–

EM: And my husband was there.

CL: My parents, my parents and a lot of other parents said that they wouldn't go because they were afraid they would lose their jobs.

PP: Uh huh.

EM: And my dad couldn't go. He was a policeman. 'Cause they said, that he, yeah.

CL: So they, so they allowed us to go.

JR: Yep.

EM: And you know, I got a job, my first job was at the police department, Pat.

PP: Really?

EM: Well, my dad said, it was part of his graduation present. 'You show up down there Monday, you got a job.'

PP: [Laughs]

EM: I had to get rid of my afro.

PP: Oh, of course.

EM: And he said, they're gonna think you're militant. We're all working for whites.

And we gotta—

JR: What year was that?

EM: 1971.

JR: Mm.

EM: We gotta please whites, we gotta do what they say, you gotta speak like they want us to speak.

PP: Sounds like my father. Yep.

EM: Everything has, was dictated by white men. 'Cause white women didn't mean nothing. White men dictated everything in this country. So, I had to get rid of my afro, I had to go somewhere and get my hair pressed.

PP: Uh-huh.

EM: And then you had to act a certain way. You couldn't be yourself—

JR: Hmm.

EM: Because you could not intimidate a white man. And so I asked my dad then—

JR: So what happens years, yeah.

EM: I said, "are they scared of everything?" [Laughs]

JR: And then, like, years later, how do you undo that. Like, how do you, like you had to stuff down a part of yourself.

EM: I had an incident that happened.

JR: You know?

[Intermittent agreement]

EM: Right there. And that did it. Right there in the middle of the floor, I'm the only Black woman, or Black employee in records. And I was called the N-word and I started crying. Now, here I thought I was cute. I even had my mini-skirt on, and my makeup. And this white woman who was a sergeant, she was in charge of records. She said, "Liz, you go to the bathroom and wash your face." Well, my makeup had ran. I looked like a raccoon. So when I went into the bathroom, and saw myself in the mirror, I said, "Never again will I cry. Somebody's gonna cry, but it ain't gonna be me." That moment, I turned into the B. In that moment, and I come out of that bathroom like, "Say something to me now." I washed my face, and from then on, a force to be reckoned with. So, those moments and what we were put through as a people made us stronger. You either got stronger or you just laid down. And I wasn't gonna lay down.

JR: So Dr. Pat, we were talking about, you said it's getting worse. So, kids today, where we thought we would be further, right? Are still having these-

PP: The same kinds of-

JR: These, and then we expect them to do well in school—

PP: Ha!

JR: You know? Do all these other life—

PP: Life requirements.

JR: Life requirements, when they're carrying an unseen burden around.

EM: But I don't depend on—a lot of it, and Pat'll tell you—is my family. Where I come from. And even with my grandkids. My grandkids. I teach them Black his-history.

PP: Mhmm

EM: I take them place—it's that strong family connection. Now, if you don't have that, then f—then, or is it, I feel a responsibility to all kids.

CL: The neighborhood. Community.

PP: Yep.

JR: Mhmm, mhmm.

EM: So not mine, but others.

PP: The shepherds of the community.

CL: Mhmm.

JR: Yeah.

EM: So if you don't have somebody, like you said.

JR: Yeah.

EM: You sitting on Brown folk—if you don't have that in your community—

PP: Aw yeah.

EM: It just ain't gonna happen.

PP: See.

JR: Mhmm.

EM: And so those fortunate ones, you know. Probably Pat had a strong—

PP: Yes, new beginnings.

EM: Back-family background.

JR: Right, that you, allows you to—

CL: [inaudible 00:28:12-00:28:13]

PP: [Laughs] Yeah.

JR: Push.

EM: Yeah.

JR: Push through.

EM: So my family, that man right there is my grandfather.

JR: Where?

EM: That pho—that photo. That's my granddad.

JR: Oh my god.

EM: He wanted to go to Perdue, but he couldn't go 'cause he was Black. So, he went to Butler.

PP: Is there a, another question on there?

JR: Here, there, I think you pull it out of the deck.

EM: Yeah, yeah. Get another card.

PP: But I, I tried, but I just saw—

CL: Yeah, we looked at it, it was all blank.

JR: Okay then, we just had our blank conversation.

EM: Okay, we just had our blank conversation.

JR: So, pull another card.

PP: Oh. *Discuss possibilities for defunding the police and unarmed mediation*

[EM Laughs] *in our communities*. Discuss the possibilities for that?

EM: I'll take that question 'cause I'm from a police family.

JR: Yeah.

EM: The word 'defund' bothers me. Who you gonna call when you in need? You gon' call the Walmart greeter? I, I, I think that word in itself turned people off and turned me off. Um, I'm, I'm not sure what word to come up with, transfer of money, I do know

they're, since we released everybody, or a lot of people from the mental health hospitals.

PP: Oh, that's terrible.

[Intermittent agreement]

EM: A lot of our problems stem from that. So, we need other people than calling the police 'cause they're showing up with the training to shoot. Now, I don't agree, and my husband don't agree, he's just retired after thirty-five years. My dad put in thirty-five years as a homicide detective here. Shooting people in the back, no. For any reason. If you're afraid of that as an officer, go get another job. But other than that, they are trained to shoot to kill. You pull a knife out, you gone. You got a gun, you're gone. But some of these people have mental health issues. So, we do need to transfer funds to go to a mental health issue so when you call the police, they ask you. It all starts with that, uh, operator. What and she needs to—

JR: Important job.

EM: Ask more questions—

JR: Important job.

EM: To send the right help to you. And and, but, and then, people need to understand the first thing: why were police created in America? And we still had that mindset. That was to put Black men down in their place. So that mindset all these

hundreds of years, and then that fear of a Black man. Because they're treated differently than I am. I had my own issues, but it's not so much like everything is geared toward Black men and the fear of what they think Black men will do. So that's my take.

Anyone else?

[Intermittent agreement]

CL: I had, I had a lot of positive experiences with PAL Club officers. Um, because they were coaches and they, they, help, helped build our community, and our neighborhoods, you know. It's called Police Athletic League. So, we played baseball, football, basketball. Um, so there was something every season, where the, where the—now, these, these were full time police officers who did this after they got off. And so, we had relationships with them, but they also lived in the neighborhood. Now, a lot of the, today, they don't live in our neighborhood, they're, nine times out of ten, they're recruited from even, from even outside. Um, for example, um, my father-in-law had a farm in, in, um, Putnam County. And, they, they, they, the State was going around buying, buying up farms from people who were not successful as farming. And a lot of these were white people. Rural white people. They sold their farms, they got jobs in the prisons that when they built the prisons on top of the land, you know they converted the land from farm to prison industrial complex. And then they gave them those people who were not successful at farming, they gave them the jobs. Then they, um, uh, [inaudible]

00:32:29] talks about in, um, 1865, there were less than a hundred Black men in Indiana in prison facilities. By 1875, there were over 2000. Okay? So, we're talking about the prison industrial complex and law enforcement, a lot of the laws, when people would come across the, when they would escape and come across the Ohio river and think that they were free, people here would hold them for the slave catchers. And a lot of those people that would hold them were law enforcement. Okay? And so, if you look at this, Indiana, the, uh, the Circle Monument, the Monument Circle, people think that it is a, a monument to the wars, but it's a monument to the south. Because, Indiana, although the political apparatus was free, the population was confederate sympathizers. And if you look at that chained up individual at the bottom of the, at the thing, you know, you'll, and then you read the artist, uh the inscriptions and stuff like that. But if, if you, if you search history and talk about what the artist was talking about, he was holding this guy for the slave catchers. Okay? The stories, they change over the years, but a lot of people, again, I'm from Brightwood-Martindale, from Martindale primarily. And we had people that were alive in the 1880s. My, my grandfather and my great-grandfather. Uh, my grandfather was born in 1886, okay? My mom was born in 1923. Okay? And so, he would tell us stories about Indiana, about Lick Creek, about Vincennes, about Seymour, about Greenwood, about, uh, strange thing really strange thing that happened [00:34:32]. Really strange thing that happened is, we took kids to Selma in, uh, 2022. To the, to the, um, who, um, Equal Justice Institute. And they have all these markers, these

uh, these things where they, where they have the names of everybody that was lynched. And James Good is, is, is Diana Daniels' ancestor. And below that, three names below that is, is, Homer Epps. He's related to Mike Epps, the comedian.

PP: Really?

JR: Ah.

CL: Then, two, two names below that is Eli Ladd, and I was blown away because students said, "Mr. Ladd, is he related to you?" I had never seen it. We'd been there, I'd been there since, going, since like the eighties. I mean, not to there. But to, since, you know, since about 19...we been taking the trip for almost forty years. But, when they, when they built this thing, I, I did not know that Eli Ladd was lynched in, uh, Henry County, which is—

JR: My gosh.

CL: Right outside Greenfield, Indiana.

JR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

CL: And so, my cousin, Reverend Keith Ladd works for the Smithsonian Institute. I sent the information to him, he found out that our great-grandfather and Eli Ladd's father were half brothers. Okay? So they had, they had different slave-

PP: I'll be darned.

CL: Different slave mamas. Different slave mamas. So, uh, I've challenged my kin, my relatives to do the research because I, my plate is—

EM: Yeah, I know what you mean.

JR: Mhmm, mhmm

CL: Is full. But I challenged my, my, my kin to do the research on it because, Eli Ladd is, is on this memorial, his, his, his, uh dirt is in a jar—

JR: Oh.

CL: And I've been there. And many times I've been there, I had never seen it, right—

EM: You didn't know. And that's your relative.

JR: Oh, my gosh.

CL: Yeah. And, but the students said, Mr. Ladd, is he related to you? And, Diane Daniels, she, she learned the same thing when she learned about hers the same day, too. Because, she said wait a minute. I had some family members down there. And then she called somebody and then they called somebody, and they called her back and said—

EM: That's him?

CL: "That's your great-uncle."

EM: Jesus!

PP: I'll be darned.

CL: You know.

JR: And it's not that long ago.

EM: No.

[Intermittent agreement]

JR: So, and that's where I wanna know how can I help with this sense of urgency? Because you talk about "I grew up here," and "my grandpar-" my grandfather was born in 1897. Okay? I didn't hear anything about the Klan, about segregation, about, you know, not until I grew into my own person and started becoming an educator. So this is a whole chunk of the population that has not been taught to care about what was going on in our own community.

PP: Yeah.

JR: You know?

EM: It's a lot of stuff back then wasn't talked about. You didn't talk about colorism, when you think of people—

PP: Colorism.

[Intermittent agreement]

EM: From Africa as being this complexion, well, how do we get like this? How do we get like this. There was some white men involved with that. So, African Americans

are probably more European than African. And it was due to one, two, three, several white men making babies, and then when they stop, um, slaves from coming in, you know, they put, stopped that, huh. We still need 'em. We got women out there.

PP: How long does this go on?

CL: Ten minutes, ah, Okay.

JR: Oh, ten minutes.

EM: Okay.

PP: You can wait ten minutes 'cause I gotta leave, too.

CL: I gotta go, yeah.

EM: Yeah, so that's a whole new ball, ball game, too.

JR: Yeah, but it's a thing, I mean, it's a—

EM: So they start making babies and then they ain't gonna talk about that.

PP: Yeah.

EM: And I don't know how the white women was taking it, but, they—

JR: Well, I think a lot of people just ignored, ignored things, you know?

EM: That kind of conversation is not gonna be talked about—

JR: And not, um—

EM: Well, even in individual families, Pat—

PP: Mhmm.

EM: You probably got grandparents that knew stuff.

PP: Oh yeah.

EM: They wasn't, I certainly did, and when—

CL: They wouldn't talk.

EM: I mentioned something one day, they gone. Mmm-mm.

PP: That's right—

EM: Mm-mm.

PP: They kept it quiet.

EM: Yeah. You got to be quiet.

PP: It was—

EM: And I still kinda have that mindset, you know, you don't tell all the family business.

JR: Mhmm.

EM: [Laughs]

PP: I just, you know, my father had a stand in the city market. The only Black person down there.

EM: Oh wow.

PP: And, he was that first—

CL: Fruit and vegetables?

PP: Yeah, he was selling fruits and vegetables. And there's a long story to how he got the stand, 'cause he worked his way through college, working for a Mr. Zears. Mr. Zears owned the stand. But when, uh, Mr. Zears, um, he was assaulted, really, by a group of people. And he handed it over to Dad. He wasn't the first, though. Francis Stout [inaudible 00:39:15] was the first. Anyway, the thing that always amazed me after I got older was, I know that as the only Black man on that city market and all these different cultures were there who owned stands. He had to be, he had to have suffered so much racism.

JR: Mm.

PP: But we never heard a word about it. I don't ever remember him talking, you know, about the experiences he had as the only Black man, um, on that city market.

EM: Mhmm. He sucked it up and took it. He went to work everyday.

PP: Yeah.

CL: Well he's probably—

PP: He used to talk to my mother about it, but he didn't talk to his children about it.

EM: Yeah.

CL: But did he, um, from, from, my, um, grandfather's and great-grandfather's standpoint, they were, they were protecting us from—

PP: Yeah, it was protection.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

CL: Hm.

PP: But was it, really? In their mind's eye—

CL: In their mind, in their mind, yeah.

EM: In their, yeah.

PP: It was, it was a chapter.

EM: That's when—

JR: But, what I mean, like, my family didn't talk about it to me.

PP: Yes.

JR: You know? And so—

EM: What were they gonna say?

JR: I don't know.

[Laughter]

CL: There you go.

EM: And, and then, maybe it mirrors—

JR: But, it's kind of like everything was okay, like it's almost like it was like, 'oh, things were great,' or, things, you know? And I just—

EM: Maybe—

JR: If we're gonna break the cycle, like, how do we—

EM: Maybe they had that mindset unknowingly, but now they, they say it out loud. We don't wanna hurt white kids' feelings. So it wasn't said out loud then.

CL: Or give 'em a guilt complex.

EM: Yeah. We don't wanna do that. So, what were they gonna tell them—

CL: Oh man, this a, whew.

EM: Because, our experiences weren't great.

PP: It's a whole lot of em.

JR: Yeah.

PP: Wow.

EM: And so what are they gon' say? We all mistreated them, we haven't—

JR: Right, right, right, right.

EM: They're not gon' tell you that.

JR: And it's like the realization of what happened.

EM: When, when we integrated Arlington High School, I, I, I didn't know what I was walking into. My parents didn't say, "Look, this is what you need to watch out for—

[Crosstalk]

PP: Huh!

JR: Yeah.

CL: We're the self-segregation.

EM: This is what's go—," none of that. You went cold turkey—

CL: [Laughs]

PP: I don't know about that.

EM: Into the storm.

JR: Yeah.

CL: That's not me. Not us.

PP: Uh-uh.

EM: There just was no conversation. So you wasn't getting it and I didn't get it either. [Laughs]

JR: Yeah, I, I just wanna know what to do—so what do we do now? [Laughs] That, that's—

EM: We, we gonna have to figure it out—

JR: What we do now, yep.

EM: Because I don't have—

JR: That's what we're doing. We're figuring it out, yeah.

[Crosstalk ends]

EM: I don't have all the answers. And I think that's something that we have to figure out collectively. 'Cause they ask Black people to come with all the answers, we're still not in charge. We ain't running things. And it doesn't make any difference what we say—

PP: We ain't got the power.

EM: We never have. And there is a huge fear of us getting it.

PP: Yeah.

CL: Huh.

EM: And I hope I'm alive when we do.

CL: When, when we.

EM: I have interviewed ten white men from seventy to eighty years old. I had one question for all of them. What are you afraid of? Three out of ten, I feel answered me truthfully. We're afraid you're gonna treat us—

PP: The same way we treated you.

EM: like we've treated you.

JR: Mmm.

EM: We are afraid you are gonna take—

PP: That's it.

EM: Our stuff. And number three, you gon' be in power, we're used to having it, and to relinquish that power, we ain't looking forward to it. That's why brown-skinned people have a difficult time coming in here. People love Trump 'cause he said it. 'We want people from Norway. We don't want people from the Mother country.'

PP: He sure did say that, his crazy self [laughs].

EM: He said it! So they love him. Them poor people send him money to get him out of jail. Poor people! He don't care nothing about them. But he's saying what they can't say. And that's putting the fear in a lot of these people. Yeah. 'Cause if they getting charged, you gon' be in trouble. You ain't gon' get no job, you ain't going—'cause they gon' take care of they own. They don't know the spirit—

JR: The spirit, yeah.

EM: And that's from living with us in this country, but not knowing us.

JR: Yeah.

CL: I've gotta get to, back to Martin University.

JR: Okay.

PP: I got to go, too.

EM: It was so good to meet you, let's be in contact.

JR: So good to see you.

CL: I think, I'm sure we've met before.

PP: Hate to leave you all here.

EM: I'm gonna call you, I don't know when, to be on my radio show. I'm gonna leave the country for a month. When I leave US, I'm gone a month.

PP: Where you going?

EM: Singapore.

JR: [Gasps]

EM: Maldives.

PP: Oh my!

CL: Wow.

EM: Malaysia. Seven Black queens, no husbands.

CL: [Laughs]

PP: That's, my daughter just went on a cruise like that.

JR: Ooooh!

CL: [Laughs]

EM: No husbands, honey. We're leavin' 'em, [Laughs], we're leaving them here [laughs].

PP: That's lovely. That's lovely.

JR: It's so nice to meet you.

EM: So nice to meet you.

JR: I'm staying. I guess I don't know where. I'm staying.

EM: Yeah, I'm staying, I'm gon' stand up.

CL: My queen, it's good to see you.

PP: You know where the restroom is, Pat?

JR: I'm standing up.

EM: Nice to meet you, sir. I'm blessed. You blessed me.

CL: And I am blessed as well.

JR: Are you gonna say goodbye to your son? [Laughs]

[Laughter]

CL: I'll have to show him a picture [inaudible 00:43:45].

KEONDRA BILLS FREEMYN: Oh, are y'all all done? Y'all all done?

CL: Uh.

PP: Yeah, I gotta go.

KF: Okay.

EM: Oh we're, we're gonna start back up. We're just taking a break. Someone does have to leave. Um, they said ten more minutes, so then we'll take a break and start back up?

KF: Oh no, after ten minutes we're finished. With the session, mhmm.

JR: Okay.

EM: Oh, well, honey we knocked it out the ballpark.

[Laughter]

EM: This has been great.

KF: Okay, well thank you so much for, uh, joining this conversation.

EM: I wish that—I had never heard of these talks before.

KF: Oh yeah! I'm so glad now you know!

EM: I would like to host one in Bloomington.

KF: Absolutely. Just reach out to us.

EM: And so, who do I contact about hosting one.

KF: Um, you can, my, I don't have any cards, but you can.

EM: You didn't bring any cards? Girl!

KF: I'm new. They haven't printed me any cards yet [Laughs].

EM: Who got cards? Because I think this is important.

KF: Okay. If you have your card though, I'll take it.

EM: I got my card.

KF: Okay.

EM: I, uh, halfway will travel.

KF: [Laughs]

JR: Okay, got a lot on my mind.

KF: Okay let me just end the recording. This is keondra bills freemyn, the date is October 21st, 2023. This is Table 1 of People's Table at Crispus Attucks Museum.

Thank you.

EM: One thing I was wanting to do is to have a panel of whites, saying what are you going—

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by Aja Scarlato 04/15/2024

To be copyedited.