File Name: BWI_101620_PPL3.wav
Event Date: October 16, 2020
Location: College Park, Maryland, USA
Participants:
NORA BELBLIDIA
MARGARET (MEG) RORISON
JULES ROSSKAM
FAHMIDA HOSSAIN
DANIELLE DAMICO
Length: 01:00:37

Preface

The following conversation was hosted virtually over Google Meet, facilitated by Heather Hart, in collaboration with University of Maryland. Consent was given by the participants to have their conversation recorded and transcribed.

Readers should keep in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word and are encouraged to refer directly to the original audio if possible as some interactions and utterances may not have been transcribed due to the nature of unscripted group conversations. The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the roundtable participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of Black Lunch Table.

START OF RECORDING

DD: Um, It's recording. And yeah, just, like, to try to keep your video and, uh, audio on just as, like, part of the ambience of the experience, um. But yeah, again, not trying to, like, facilitate or [Laughs] anything but, like, uh, whoever wants to, like, go to that site, and then, we can pull cards. And I-I think all they will ask that we do within our breakout room is to, like, go around and like, state your name and, like, maybe your affiliation, and yeah, where you're from. We could do that?

[Pause]

NORA BELBLIDIA: Okay, I'll go first. Uh. [Laughs] I'm Nora, um, I live in Baltimore. I grew up about an hour away. Um, and I'm a writer. Um, I am a freelancer, but I write regularly for BmoreArt, but I'm-I'm not here in that capacity. Um, then--. Yeah, I guess that's- that's it. [Laughs]

MEG RORISON: Um, I guess I'll go. [Laughs] Um, uh, I can--. You can call me Meg. And, um, I am a filmmaker and also, um, uh, teach at the Baltimore School for the Arts, which is a high school in Baltimore City. Um, and I also run a film series called *Sight Unseen* that, um, it takes place at Parkway, but it's sort of on a hiatus now. And I might go do virtual screenings, but right now, I haven't made a plan. So, yeah. [Laughs]

[Pause]

JULES ROSSKAM: Um, I'm Jules. Uh, I currently live in Baltimore, though I'm in the process of leaving, um, uh--.

MR: (inaudible - 00:01:52)

JR: What's that?

MR: Where are you going?

JR: Um, at the moment, I'm going to Philadelphia. So, not too far. Um, I teach at UMBC. Um, I am also a filmmaker. Um, yeah. I think that's-that's suffice. [Laughs]

FAHMIDA HOSSAIN: Hi, I'm Fahmida Hossain. Uh, I'm from Bangladesh, and I'm currently living in here. And, um, and my undergraduation was in architecture, but I'm really interested in art and--.

NB: Sorry, you're a little quiet. Is it possible to--? Is the--? I don't know if it's just me, but--.

JR: No, it's--. I ca--. It's hard to hear.

NB: Yeah.

FH: Can you hear me now?

NB: That's better. Yeah.

FH: Okay. I'm Fahmida Hossain. I'm living in Bangladesh. And, um, I'm in first year in IMDA. And, um, that's all.

DANIELLE DAMICO: Uh, I'm Danielle. And I'm also in the UMBC's IMDA MFA Program. And, uh, an artist working in video, mostly.

DD: Oh, yeah. This is great. I don't know if we, uh--. If, like, we should go to the cards individually or if somebody should share their screen. I guess- I guess the idea is to kinda keep us all here maybe and to see- be able to see each other.

JR: I- I'm happy to g--. I have the site up if--.

DD: Okay, cool. Yeah, yeah.

JR: Flip through? Well, I mean, I think we saw the first one, which is: Um, how do you- *How do you support Black owned businesses?*

[Pause]

DD: Do y'all want to talk about that or do you--? We can sh- we can approach it however you want.

[Pause]

JR: I mean, I'm happy to talk about it. It seems like t--. So I guess, from my perspective, like, not necessari--. Like, it would be sort of just like a — this is a checklist, sort of? I don't know that it's, like, an in depth conversation? But, like, who knows?

DD: Yeah.

JR: Uh, hard to predict. Um, so I guess, I could just say that, um, I make a pretty strong effort actually to, like, keep an ongoing list of Black owned businesses, both wherever I'm currently living and then nationally. Um, and so pretty much every time I try--. Every time I need to buy something, um, I go to those places first. Um, and, uh, um--. Yeah, well, it's pretty straightforward, I think, for me.

[Pause]

DD: Yeah.

MR: Yeah, I guess living in Baltimore, there are a lot where I live and, um--. Especially with food there, I guess, try to support a lot of the f- um, businesses near my neighborhood, if I want to get takeout, um--. And then, there are a lot of, um, artists in Baltimore so consciously trying to support--. Um, uh, I guess just thinking more how you are a conscious consumer and not supporting, um, big-big corporations is important to me, but, um--. Yeah, knowing exactly who you're giving money to and supporting is important.

DD: Yeah, I think that level, you know, like--. I think you said, like, conscious consumption. And I think especially--. I mean, I-I've always tried to, you know, sing about that a lot, but especially when just all the small businesses I've worked for in the past, and, like, you know, my family owns a small business, like, when the pandemic happened, it was just like, 'Oh,' like, 'we've really, like--.' Sometimes, you just don't think about, like, everything that you can get right around here, you know? Like, things that you would just maybe order anyway --this is, like, a tangent, but-- is, especially--. Yeah, like, I think it tends to be way more like food, and shopping that I support, uh, Black

owned businesses, like pretty regular- pretty regularly. Like, um, Black Sauce, I ordered from them last weekend and that's, like, good, like, vegan food. Uh, Land of Kush, and--. Uh, my mom was vegan. And then, just, like, yeah, just--. I have, like, a list of, like, you know, different vintage shops or coffee shops and just thinking about really, like, making an effort to support not just small businesses in Baltimore, but Black owned businesses too, ‘cause, I mean, i-it's just--. It's Baltimore. Like, there's so many Black owned businesses.

[Pause]

NB: Yeah, I feel like I, um, you know, fall similarly to you guys. Um, I think, you know, I can always be doing more, and I feel like I--. Jules, if you wanted to share that list, I would be [Laughs]--.

DD: Yeah. (inaudible - 00:06:51)

NB: I'm- I'm more so, uh, yeah, make a concerted effort to, like, avoid big businesses and-and shop locally, in my everyday life. And-and also, um, you know, yeah, because it's Baltimore, a lot of times it is a Black owned business. Um, and then I feel like--. I think I could do a better job of, um, you know, buying my, like, necessities from Black owned businesses. I feel like when I do support, it's more so, um, when it's like, ‘Oh, I don't really need this thing, but I will buy it to support this business,’ you know what I mean? Versus like, ‘I need this thing. Wha--?’ Does that--? I don't know if that makes sense. But, um, but yeah, and then, um--. Yeah, like, also thinking about artists and, um, just also just being aware of who's creating and who's out there and, um, and showing up in that way.

[Pause]

FH: Yeah, I think this situation is not applicable in our country. Like, uh, we all are Brown here. So, I'll, um--. Uh, I and my family are generally trying to buy groceries from women here, like small vendor or local people rather than big grocery stores (inaudible - 00:08:24). So, um, uh, and they, uh, cultivate these in our nearby areas, and also (inaudible - 00:08:34) and nearby farmers and reduce the transportation costs. So, we are doing (inaudible - 00:08:42).

DD: Just like a sustainable local economy. Yeah, Jules, I want to get your list too, especially if it's national. I feel like I have some, like, Baltimore lists saved, but--.

JR: Yeah, I have to- I'll have to, um, compile it because they're like links--.

DD: Yeah.

JR: Bookmarks. Um, but I'll try to get it together and send it out to y'all. I feel like my-my best one is, like, how not to use Amazon, which I stopped doing a couple years ago and made a real commitment to. Um, which took a lot of digging around for like how you get the things you would just normally, like, go there. Um, which also, like, it's a--. [Sighs] It's like, you also have to have, like, be able to spend a little bit more money. I mean, that's the reality, right? It's like, often if you're not gonna buy from, like, a big chain or a big store like that, you're going to end up paying more money. Like, even just, like, lo- shopping at your local hardware store versus, like, going out to like Lowe's or something like that. It's going to cost more money. So like, I feel like that's also the- a complex part of these decisions around, like, where you shop is, like, there's o-often an economic privilege that goes along with, like, making quote, unquote, more ethical decisions about, like, where you get products from.

DD: Well, and time decisions too.

JR: Yes, totally.

DD: (inaudible - 00:10:05) You know, if you're working three jobs and you don't have time to--. Not- I'm not- I'm not saying that's me, but like, you know--.

JR: Yeah.

DD: And you have to order your toilet paper on Amazon ‘cause you don't have a car or something. It's like- it's just like, that's how they get you into it. It's just a convenience.

JR: Yeah, totally.

DD: It’s time to, like, do all this ethically and--. Yeah, trying--.

NB: Yeah. And I mean that, I think, you know, that relates to food also, as far as like, who gets to buy organic? Um, who has time to cook a meal at home? You know? Um, or who has time to even just like, yeah, like you said, like, having access to a car, um, or, um, or even having, like, a grocery store in your neighborhood? Um.

MR: Yeah, I mean, um, I think--. Like, I-I feel really lucky; I don't have a car and I can walk everywhere. And I th- I think about how, like, more and more that the cities are gentrifying and pushing out people and how, like, then it becomes a lot harder to have access to food or, um, necessities and how--. Like, how the cities are shifting and changing and gentrifying in a way that pushes out people that’ve--. Yeah, I mean, I don't know. I think about access- yeah, accessibility, I think is a big thing in the city for sure. I just shared a link to, like, one of my favorite candle shops. It's Black owned business and they are the best scents ever. And they're in Baltimore, but (inaudible - 00:11:40)--.

DD: Oh, I think I follow them on Instagram. And I've been--. Like, I've been meaning to like, ‘Oh, next time I buy candles, like, I'm gonna buy--.’

NB: You know what, I have--.

MR: (inaudible - 00:11:49)

NB: I didn’t- I have their candles, but I didn't know that they were Black owned.

MR: Yeah.

NB: That's cool. That's good to know.

JR: Thanks, Meg.

MR: [Laughs]

DD: Thank you.

JR: Oh, should I check out the next, uh--? ‘Kay. All right, I'm gonna read this. I'm gonna put in a-a- a vote for passing on it, but I-I’m- I don't feel super strongly about that. So, it's: *University of Maryland campuses were desegregated in 1954. How is this history visible on campus?* My only vote for passing is that not everyone here is part of University of Maryland system, but--.

NB: Yeah, I- I vote to pass.

[Clicking and whooshing]

JR: Oh, okay, um, *Discuss the privatization of K12 education, literacy rates, and access to college education.*

[Pause]

MR: There's, um--. Do you know Dr. Lawrence Brown? He's, um, he coined the term, um, the Black Butterfly, and he has a book coming out in January, I think. But, um, he talks a lot about schools. And, um, I mean, I guess this is a- I think this is a--. He- he was talking a lot about how--. He has a lot of terms I can’t- that he- can't remember the-

one of the terms. So basically, like, I fe--. Like, Chicago and Baltimore are strong examples, but how cities have start--. Just the underfunding of public schools and how it's a- it's- it's a good conscious tactic. Or, the, like, how private schools have been, you know, taking, like, even with grants during the-the Coronavirus, there are private schools in-in Baltimore County [Clears throat] that have received these grants and taken this money from, you know, helping to help other schools that would need it more, I think. Um, but I think, yeah, privatization is, like, a big problem, especially in Baltimore City, I think with education, and, um, how you can just sort of see how there are a lot of buildings that have been neglected, and, you know, all the water fountains you can't drink in ‘cause there's-there's lead paint, um, in the pipes- or lead in the pipes. Um, and it's--. It seems like a--. I mean, it seems very racist and conscious of, like, how to continue to, like, under- underfund and not support certain communities. Um, and that Baltimore has, like, a big history of, like, the Baltimore--. Like, I feel like Baltimore County has a lot of control over--. I don't know. I’m sorry. I'm not- [Laughs] I’m not so articulate right now, but I think, um, I think it's a big issue in Baltimore City. [Laughs]

NB: You’re articulate. And I feel like you also probably, because you're an educator. I mean, I- I see it from the outside, you know? Like, I feel like I'm aware of things but I don't work in a school.

MR: Yeah, I mean--. Well, see, I work in a school that has a lot of private funders though, too. There's a foundation, um--. So, it's not- it's not the best example of working for a school in the city that's- ‘cause it's- it's unique in its situation, so. Um, we have a lot of, like--. Or, there are a lot of, like, wealthy elite that like to fund Baltimore School for

the Arts, and, um, yeah, it's a very different situation than, like, another public school in the city.

[Pause]

JR: Yeah, I was, uh, just being at UMBC, like, pretty shocked and appalled by the number of students I have who've gone through Baltimore public school system who are functionally illiterate. I mean, like, actually, like, cannot read or write. Um, and it's such a- feels like a trap, like, uh, or like and impo--. It's like a catch 22, as a i- encountering a student like that that's already in college? Because also, there's a question of sort of, like, how did they even get there? And like, how were they failed so many times along the way? Um, and then, like, wanting to make an intervention, but feeling kind of like it's too late? Um, because it's like, what do I do? Someone's- I- a senior in college, and I'm encountering them for the first time, and realizing they literally can't write a sentence, and- but everyone else has passed them. And then, it's like, on- and then what do--? You know, it's just like, I-I don't know, it feels like an impossible, um, thing to deal with. Um, and I continue--. I mean, I'm both surprised and not surprised that there's, like, hasn't been a class action lawsuit against the Baltimore public school system because it's il- technically illegal, obv-obviously, for a student to graduate and be illiterate. Um, and, yeah, I mean, it's just, it's such a clear example of systemic racism, that--. It's- um, it's horrifying. And like, I-I really think that on a large level, like, things in American culture will never change unless our education system changes dramatically. Public education system.

NB: Yeah, I feel like--. I mean, it's definitely racism. Um, probably, mostly racism, but I think, you know, it's also, like, capitalism. Like, I just think of like, um, it's like a

deliberate--. There's a deliberate attempt to, um, like, under-fund, you know, public services in order to, like, create that need for private services. So like, looking at, like, the US Postal Service, and there's, like, a deliberate, um, uh--. They are, like, deliberately making service bad in order to, like, m-make us want FedEx or UPS or things that people can profit off of. And that's, like, you know, the same that, like, Betsy DeVos is doing with like, um, you know, if you can make public schools, uh, bad enough, then people who can afford it will want to pay for private schools, and they'll wanna pay more money, you know. Um, so it's really evil. [Laughs]

DD: I think that there has been this question of, like, you know, just friends I have in the city that have kids, you know, like, it just seems like, or-or like white people anyway, they're like, ‘Okay, well, we either have to move out to the county, or we have to, like, fi-, like, have a private school education.’ And it's just like, that's kind of the problem is, like, there's this segregation there, because if more, you know, white parents sent their kids to these schools — which, like, because of the reputation of the public schools with, like, you know, the low literacy rates, all the issues, they don’t, but there's always been this sort of, like, speculative case: well, i- if the white kids do start going to those schools, then does it improve? Like, does--? Like, is this, like, something that can sort of be changed by individual family choices within the city, but with- as with so many of the systemic problems, it's like, yes, people can do their part to do what they think is right. But at the--. like, stuff has to come from the top down.

NB: Yeah, I mean, I think like regardless of, um, race, you know, I mean, it often is like, what parents who have the m-money, but I think, um, if you're a parent who's involved enough in your children's education to care about where they go to school and

you have the funds that you are considering, like private school as an option, then that means that if you were to make the choice to send your kid to a public school, you'll be, um, involved in their education and also, like, lobby for better resources, you know what I mean? Um, and I think- I think is it Nikole Hannah-Jones? I forget if, um--. I know she did the 1619 project at, um, The New York Times. I don't remember if--. Is she also the Education, uh, Beat person? I know that there's like a re- a reporter who, um, has focused on, like, education in New York. And-and she talks a lot about that. Of, like, basically, you know, like, a lot of white liberals in New York City who, like, espouse all these, like, progressive values, they j- they then send their kids to private school. Um, and it just, like, how much just that choice is like a divestment from their community? Um, yeah.

DD: Right.

FH: Our education system is different in here, so, uh, I don't know if it's relevant fit for discussion. But, (inaudible - 00:21:03), uh, government school or city government school are more competitive than private school. And it's difficult and hard to get into, uh, a government or (inaudible - 00:21:15). And our, uh, curriculum in, like, schools are in, um, Bengali. And our syllabus', um, have more courses--. Uh, I mean, courses like this, uh, or topic, are more than the English medium schools here. So when we tried, uh, to get admit in university for undergraduates, and most of the students who are came from a government school, they get more chances, because they-they have (inaudible - 00:21:53 to 00:21:56) English speaking schools. And--.

NB: That was a--.

FH: (inaudible - 00:22:01) is cheap here. They have- they gave government incentives and--. But, uh, the thing is, uh, there, uh, we have a huge population, so people and students are more competitive to secure their, uh, education. That's why, actually, uh, their, uh, improvement is come from themselves, not from government. And they do lots of coachings and, uh, (inaudible - 00:22:31) uh, for their improvement. We (inaudible - 00:22:36) normal, regular school classes, so they're more competitive in, like, in all of the- all Asian schools.

JR: Hm.

NB: Thanks for sharing. I was- I was curious about how your experience is different from ours. Um--.

MR: (inaudible - 00:22:57) Like everything is so privatized, everything's about making money or profit and--. Like, healthcare, too. I don't know if there's a (inaudible - 00:23:04 to 00:23:07) not. [Laughs] Yeah, I think it's similar as education in a lot of ways.

NB: Definitely, yeah. [Pause] Yeah, I mean, um, yeah, my--. I'm half Algerian, my dad is from Algeria and so that's, like, the only other country I have, like, a more intimate knowledge of, even though I didn't grow up there. And, yeah, it's similar, I think maybe, more similar to Bangladesh, a-as far as like, um--. Yeah, like, the-the public school systems are pretty good. And that's because they're- there's investment and it's also cheap. [Laughs] You know, like, um, like, college is, like, pretty much free. Um, which is just, like--. I don't know. If you speak to an average American, probably they--. You know, just like so many, like, quote, unquote, like, third world countries are doing things way better than the US, like--. [Laughs] Like, I feel like. Yeah.

[Pause]

DD: ‘Cause the US is like a capitalist guinea pig that, like, can't g--. Like, I don't know. They're just, like, can't give up the experiment I feel like. I'm like, all these other countries did it for a long time before and it was, you know, relatively okay. But it was just like, ‘Oh, we're gonna try this new thing.’ And then, you know, we’re still here today, we can’t just, like, give up.

NB: Well, I think, also, I mean, at least in the case of Algeria, um, and I think countries that have, [Pause] you know, been colonized, uh, like, education was taken away from them, you know? Like, Algeria, um, you know, fought a very bloody independence war in order to have the right to education, um, because--. You know, I mean, the French, um--. Yeah, like, the French taught them, but they didn't speak that--. You know, they didn't teach them in their native tongue. Um, it was segregated. Like my great grandfather, I have, like, a class photo, and it's like, the indigenous class, you know, and it's like, the native Algerians were educated separately from, like, the French colonists. Um, and I think, like, for that reason, I mean, I think I see that in like, immigrant-immigrant culture in the US, as far as, um, like, there--. It’s, like, the stereotype of, um, you know, like, the immigrant parents, like, really wanting their kids to have, like, straight A's, stuff like that. But I mean, I do think that is like a consequence of like, um--. Yeah, they just see how important it is. Um, and they've- and they fought hard to get it. [Pause] Yeah.

DD: That's a good point. (inaudible - 00:26:06) [Pause] I mean, like, I think, Jules, what you're saying earlier, it's just like--. I think, like, that sort of mentality is sort of there just like systemically where it's like, okay, well--. Like, yeah, depriving people of a proper

education as a way to, like, forever oppress people, you know? And that's like, Baltimore City education systems, other city university systems across the country — not even inner city, rural areas too. It's just like--. It starts very, very early.

JR: Yeah--.

MR: There's a (inaudible - 00:26:47) shared [Laughs]. But it's a book. I haven't read it but Dr. Lawrence Brown recommended it in one of his talks. He talked to us at Baltimore School for the Arts, but um, it's about how a lot of schools are closing, um, like, Chicago--. It's about Chicago, but he said that Baltimore and Chicago are, um, very similar in how, um--. He had a term like, um, just how the economics ties into racism. And, um, what he was saying, um, that actually, if you look at the Baltimore map, Baltimore city map, and you see where all the schools are closing, they're all in the Black Butterfly. Um, and it's not just by chance. So it's, yeah, like, denying, like, Jules, you were saying (inaudible - 00:27:30) opportunities.

JR: Yeah, I mean, it's like we- I- I would love to see a map of, like, all of the, um, like, vote-voting locations that are closing overlaid on top of those school closures, 'cause I'd be willing to bet that they line up pretty exactly. Um, Yeah. And then, I think also, just like, I think going back to, like, I think something Nora brought up earlier about capitalism is, like, an- the education system in the United States, to the best of my knowledge was at least initially, in part developed in order to prepare workers for the workforce. Like, and that capitalism requires a certain number of people to be living below the poverty line, and requires, um, uh, like, large numbers of, what I think in this country we call quote, unquote, unskilled labor, um, which obviously is a ridiculous term to begin with, but like--. So it-it's like, the school system therefore has to perpetuate

these inequalities. Um, and like, that's, I think a- also another, like, larger issue, and why so often, like, issu- issues around like race and class are overlapping within education systems. Um--.

NB: Well, it's kinda like the whole, like, supply and demand thing, right? Of, like, if people, like, are educated, and there's, like, you know? If they don't need [Laughs] the low paying jobs, they won't take them, right? Um, so like, yeah. [Sighs] Yeah. I--. Well, I had a question, I guess. Uh, so, like, related to the first question about like, how does one- how do you support Black owned businesses? I'm wondering, like, what are ways to support, like, Black education? Um, and I mean, I guess, you know, if you're a parent, you can send your kid to, like, the public school and that's, like, one way. Um, I know, like, right before the pandemic, I was, like, looking into, um, volunteering with a- some, like, nonprofit called Reading Partners where you basically just, like, um, come to schools and read to kids, you know, like, children's books. Um, and it's a way to kind of, like, supplement a--. Like, it's mostly, like, remedial learning, you know? But, um, yeah, other than that, I don't really know, yeah, ways. It's not as easy as being like, ‘Oh, here's a list of places I can spend my money.’

MR: I think it's tricky. Like, I think, like--. There's been a lot of conversation, at least at Baltimore School for the Arts, how, um, there need to be Black- more Black, um, teachers, but also, um, um, administrators and, um, not just, uh, like people that make decisions in the school, um. And like, right now, we have a white man that's the director of the school, um, and he's retiring, so there's a lot of talk about who should replace him. Um, but also, like, the curriculum. I think- I think it's just a big conversation about, like, what's been taught to, um, and who's teaching and what- how, as, like, Black

students, do they have role models? And are they being given- shown- being shown--? I mean, I guess, as teacher, you know, anyone who's teaching that's something to always consider, but--. Yeah, I think it's tricky if someone who's not a teacher, does not have a kid, like, how do you- how do you support that? I mean, I guess our tax money? Like, I don't know, it seems like- like [Pause] voting for certain--. I don't know. It just seems really corrupt [Laughs] that, like, the money's always reallocated, or how they were gonna build the casinos to help fund schools, but that never happened. Um. And there's the Baltimore's teachers union that I think is pretty great. And they've- they fight and speak up about a lot of issues. But, um, yeah. I don't know. I don't--. [Laughs]

DD: Yeah, I mean, I've done some after school stuff over the years, but again, it's like, uh, [Pause] charter schools. Which, like, I don't really understand how those operate in Baltimore City either, but I know, there's some, like, [Pause] weird politics there, too. Um, but, you know, just having those sort of extended--. I-I don't know that that was even a complicated situation for me, 'cause it's just like, I know a lot of these kids are, like, already in school since 8 am, and like, the last thing I want to, like, be making them do after school is, like, have like a curriculum. And I--. Sometimes I just feel like, 'All right, like, let's do whatever you want,' you know? Like, just 'cause that seems--. I don't know. Like, there's a lot of organizations, I think, and Baltimore that are doing that. Um, and it seems helpful. But I'm also like--. Yeah, it is ver- it's a really complicated question, um, of just that of, like--. 'Cause even, like, financially, it's not like you donate.

FH: My mother is--.

NB: What was that?

FH: My mother is working in a primary school and most of our students are very, uh, they come from a very poor family. Like, their father, uh, (inaudible - 00:32:57) are delive- deliver in this type of situation. So, government is working on some NGOs, and they are giving students if they have (inaudible - 00:33:10) attendance in school for a month, they will give them like $5, um, for each student. So $5 is, um, like around ৳300 in our country. So even if they get ৳300, every month, it was a great help for them. So, this is how they are encouraging, uh, parents to send their students to school.

DD: Oh, so they're getting paid to go to school.

FH: Yes. They're also doing this for, uh, women in the (inaudible - 00:33:44) in village area, uh, for, like, up to college, uh, level. If they came to the high school or college, they, uh, they will get money from, um, from (inaudible - 00:33:58).

DD: That's interesting--.

JR: (inaudible - 00:34:01)

DD: Uh, I was talking to a friend--.

JR: Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

DD: I was talking to a friend recently who's been a Baltimore City school teacher for the past five years and she brought that up. She was like, 'I think they need to get paid.' She was like, 'Each of these kids has a dollar sign over their head.' So like, I forget what the exact amount is, but she's like, each of them has this, you know, there's many 1000s of dollars on there. And so, she's like, 'I think they need to get paid to go to school.' And I-I don't know. Uh, we--. I forget, like, [Laughs] what other points got

brought up, but I was just like, ‘Yeah, that would- that would make sense as like a public service,’ you know? Like--. Or just improve the schools, or--. Yeah, I don’t know. What were you gonna say, Jules? But yeah, it’s--.

JR: Oh, yeah. It was just reminding- or making me think of, like, how many- how many kids rely on getting fed at schools, right? That, like, thinking about getting paid to go to school, it's like the- a lot of them are getting like two meals a day and that's the only place they get food. I mean, I know certainly in Baltimore, there were, like, questions or concerns about, like, when the schools were shut down because of COVID. It was like, ‘How are a large number of these kids who rely on the school for food going to eat?’ Um, And which, just, like, u-underlines to me, like, how fucked up [Laughs] thi-this country is that, like, s- you know, there are so many students who need the school in order to meet their most basic needs as humans. And it's like, all of these things, like after school programs and whatever, it's like, all of these, like, alternatives, basically, that get proposed to public education — which I do believe as someone who grew up in public education and went to a private school for the last two years of high school, um, and have very, very varied experiences in both public and private schools. Like, I believe in public education. And I think like--. I mean, I know this is, like, an ov- gro- a gross oversimplification, but like, we need a massive reinvestment in public education; nothing else is gonna fix the problem. Not to say that’s the only thing that will fix it, but everything else just feels like- kind of like sticking your finger in the hole of the sinking ship.

DD: Mm-hmm.

JR: And unless the ship is fixed, it's just going to keep sinking in different ways. Um, so, yeah. I don’t know.

DD: I can get behind that. Massive reinvestment.

JR: (inaudible - 00:36:32)

DD: We’re just solving the world's problems.

JR: Yeah, that’s right.

DD: Right here, in this Zoom meeting.

MR: (inaudible - 00:36:38)

NB: Should we do another question, or?

MR: I made- I made Crystal’s--.

DD: Oh, you made it?

MR: Bread, and that’s what I’m eating, but it's really good. I didn't make the whipped cream yet, but, um--.

DD: Oh, (inaudible - 00:36:49)

NB: Where did you get purple corn meal?

MR: I got--. Well, I got it at Mom's ‘cause I like walked there. But it's not--. I think it doesn’t--. It's like organi--. It, like, doesn't have the dye so it's not purple in the end. It doesn't have the beautiful color. So it's just like a yellow cornbread. But--.

DD: Were you able to get everything for that at Mom's?

MR: Um, I had some of the other stuff. Everything else was kind of more basic baking stuff. Um, so. But I didn't- I didn't get the entrees because I didn't-. I- yeah--. The clay and the lotus leaf, I didn't really have time, and I also don't eat meat, but I, um--. I

thought--. Yeah. [Laughs] The cornbread is really good. It's kind of sweet though. Like, it's a dessert, it has a lot of--. I tried to put a little less sugar in it, but it's really good.

NB: What about squash puree? How did--?

MR: Oh, yeah. I did--. I just baked an acorn squash, and then I- I just kind of, like, mashed it up and it was pretty soft.

NB: Okay. Yeah, I was gonna make--. I was gonna try and do the cornbread this morning, but I ran out of time. And I was like, ‘Oh, shit. I have to, like, [Laughs] roast a butternut squash.’ I didn’t factor--. I thought I was just gonna, like, mix a bunch of dry ingredients in a bowl. [Laughs] Yeah, the recipes are pretty, uh--. I do wanna try them, but I--. Yeah, I tried to--. I, like, went to Whole Foods yesterday. I was like- got, like, a cornish hen and a bunch of other--. I was like, I- I'm gonna get the stuff I think it's hard to find at Whole Foods and then I went to Giant for the rest of it. But, um, yeah, I, like, stopped by Baltimore Clayworks and they were like--. Like, they didn't really know what to- what to give me [Laughs] ‘cause they were like, ‘I don't--.’ They were like, ‘I don't know what they- what she means by, like, kiln fired clay.’ And then, also you could only buy like 25 pounds worth. [Laughs] I was like, ‘I don’t want,’ you know, ‘that much.’ And then- and then, I stopped by Clayworks which is on Falls and close by, and they were closed, and you can only order it online, but it was also, like, you could only buy, like, the clay in bulk, you know, because it's made for like ceramicists.

MR: Yeah.

NB: So, I still don't know.

[Laughter]

JR: Um, I think we probably have time to talk about one more thing unless it's-it's--. So, I-I-I--. What if I read like three different ones? And then, if, like, someone feels super strongly about one you could dive in and we'll talk about it?

NB: Yeah.

JR: Just (inaudible - 00:39:23) some options. Okay. Uh, so one is, *How does the polarization of politics affect you in your community?*

[Clicking and whooshing]

DD: I love the sound.

MR: Yeah, what is that?

DD: The cards. From the cards.

MR: Oh.

JR: From the cards turning. Um, *Discuss the possibilities for unarmed mediation in communities: ie. community watch versus police involvement.* [Clicking and whooshing] Um, I'll go towards the end and pick another one. [Clicking and whooshing] *What should we do with Confederate monuments?*

NB: Oh. [Laughs]

JR: That's easy, burn ‘em to the ground.

NB: Uh.

MR: (inaudible - 00:40:04) museums or something? I feel like--. Well, anyway--. Sorry, now I'm trying to answer that question. [Laughs]

JR: I- answer--. I just, you know, throw them all out there. And so, if one jer- speaks to anyone to talk about.

NB: I would maybe--. Yeah, I feel like the Confederate monuments thing, I feel like we probably are all on the same page, and I feel like that's been just discussed a lot, just in general. Uh, what was the one about polarization?

JR: It was just: *Discuss how*, um, the political polarization or *the polarization of politics*, um, *affects you and your communities.*

NB: I would be into discussing that one. Are you good--? Would you be into that?

MR: Yeah.

JR: Sure, go for it.

NB: Since there was a--. I don't wanna steer it or whatever but--. Um. Well, yeah, I guess, like, uh, for me, personally, I am definitely in, like, a progressive bubble. Uh, and so I would say, I don't know, like, the polarization has immediately affected me. It's not like I have family members who are like hardcore Trump supporters or anything close to that. Um, but I-I-I guess I do just think about, like, the bubble and how--. I'm mean, not that I, like, particularly want to be friends with, [Pause] you know, [Laughs] conservatives? But, um, I guess- I-I guess I do think about, yeah, maybe just, like, how- how little I know of, like, what the other side thinks? Um, and just how, you know, on the one hand, I [Pause] I don't agree with a lot of it, so it's not like I, um, want to give it that much time. But on the other hand, it's like, am I just ignoring--? You know, like, am I just, uh, being super, I guess, ignorant of, like, what so many people are thinking or doing or — if that makes sense?

MR: I think it can--. Yeah, I think it can be da--. Like, I definitely feel I'm in a bubble, we're in a bubble. And, um, I think--. I mean, I think in-in the arts community, there is a bubble for me. Um, but the people I hang out with, I'm definitely a bubble. And

I think that can be really dangerous. Um. And I--. Like even last night, I mean, I didn't watch any of the t- either of the town halls, but they were just running at the same time on two different stations. And it's like, I felt like that was just such a like- that just made--. Of course, it happens. Ridiculous. [Laughs] But I- I ha- I have one cousin that is like a big Trump supporter, and I tried to talk to her and that, I mean, she just ignored me and like, didn't want to talk. And, um, that's what scares me, too. It's like, how do you even have these conversations if both sides are just, like, not engaging with one another. My-my friend from Venezuela, like this isn't when Trump won. She lives in New York now. But she was saying that this is- that's what happened in Venezuela. Like, she-she said, um, that the right ignored--. Like, the left ignored the right, and they just were like, 'This is ridiculous,' and that the right just grew. Um, and that there was no dialogue between the two sides. And I guess that's what's happening. [Laughs]

NB: Yeah, I mean, it's kinda like--. Sorry, I--. Sorry to jump in. But I was just think--. Like, we were talking about segregation and, like, public schools versus private or racial segregation. And, uh, I mean, I think there has always been, like, a segregation of ideologies, but I feel like it's even more pronounced now. And yeah, just, like, how- how damaging segregation of any kind is, um, in terms of like, fostering empathy [Laughs], or like any sort of middle ground?

MR: Yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

JR: I also--. Yeah, it feels just like one of the, I think, broader impacts of it is that it just reifies these syste- these binary systems as if--. Like, when we--. Even just saying "the other side" as if there's only two sides to things we talk about? Um, um, it- uh--.

That, to me, is like one of the more damaging parts of it, ‘cause it trickles into just our own, like, our own ways of thinking. Um, and that that impacts how we think about everything. Um, and the ways in which, like--. I mean, I think y-you know, there's like, uh, memes all the time about a-along this line, but, you know, that the idea that, like, someone contesting the fact that, like, me, or people like me, should be allowed to exist? Like as if that's, like, another side of me being like, I deserve the right to exist. Like, those are not equivalent, actually. Um, and so, I think that's also a dangerous thing that happens with this discourse is normalizing, like, hatred, um, and vitriol as, like, somehow a reasoned position on an eye- on a political issue that someone came to. Um, like, they're just not that it's not the same--. There's these false equivalencies, I think, that are really dangerous. Um, and is part, I think, of what maybe is, like, pushes this divide, where we feel like there's no room to, like, speak to each other, um, and speak to the nuances, um, of our existence and of, like, um, trying to navigate space together.

DD: Yeah.

[Pause]

FH: Here, um, there's a class (inaudible - 00:46:09) religious minded people and oppressed people. Like, uh, if you believe in religion, you are not supposed to believe in some ideologies and some progressive ideologies, because if you believe them and also believe your religion, then it will conflicting with your religion. So people are deliberately opposing any progressive ideologies here. And, um, it wasn't, um, prominent even five years ago, but now, I'm mean, through the social media and everything, uh, I think, uh, uh--. Because they, like, uh--. I think that, uh, there's not-not-

uh--. Because of lack of, uh, communication, uh, in social media, like, we are thinking, ‘Okay,’ uh, our--. Well, I’m living with same kind of people around me and other kind of same mind with me, but now when, um, you're more engaging with social media, uh, uh, opposite--. I mean, uh, uh, religious minded people, uh, get in touch with our statuses or our posts and they are opposing it and creating an issue. Like, um, here there's a conflict between Hindus, Muslims, like India and Bangladesh, and also like, uh, atheist and religious people, and they’re start fighting. Uh, like, most of the things, uh, like, religious people, uh, are like they're- they're- (inaudible - 00:47:52) they're--. I think, uh, what- what we what's happening here like you're seeing so many theories, they're also (inaudible - 00:48:01 to 00:48:05) ten year cycle and they killed some bloggers because they’re write something oppressive and they didn't like it, so they killed them. Like, this have, uh--. This, uh, actually a-affect our community as our country's very small, our city is small. So, um, like, they killed one blog-blogger (inaudible - 00:48:32) a book fair. So like, every time I go, uh, our annual book fair, I, uh, just, like, think that, ‘Okay, someone was killed here in this (inaudible - 00:48:46).’ So, people are also sometimes afraid to speak, uh, something and also, uh, when they speak, uh, there always a conflict between (inaudible - 00:49:00) people. And then nobody, uh, want to, uh, give their ideology because that's the way of their thinking. And I was thinking, like, uh, like with the--. Uh, it's also hard to the religious people to ignore their rules, so that they are reading in their, uh, Quran or Bibles. So, I also, um, think that they're, uh, doing right from their- from themselves, and we're also trying to do right from ourself.

[Pause]

NB: I think- I think also, though, like, there's like a co-option of religion by conservatives, I think, around the world, like, certainly in the US, but--. I mean, I'm just thinking of, like, uh, yeah, like, again, my family in Algeria. Like, my grandparents were very religious, like, they prayed five times a day, they, you know, they followed everything in Islam and, um, and were very devout, but they weren't conservative. Um, and, uh. And like similarly, yeah, like the, I would say the r- you know, radical right in, um, in Algeria there, it's the Islamists and they've like, you know, in the 90s, they, like, terrorized the country. Um, but I think there's like--. Yeah, I would say that--. [Pause] They're--. You know, I don't qualify them as, like, religious, even though they call themselves--. You know--.

[NB intermittently agrees]

FH: Just like my family and friends are also like that. They wear hijab and they, uh, they went--. Uh, we went concert together, like, but it's not allowed in Islam to go, uh, concerts. So, like, the, uh, uh, one, I would say, like, in my bubble, everyone is more or less progressive and also follow religion, but there is a huge part of people who’re, um, more radical.

NB: Yeah, and I mean, you see that in the US too, like the Christian right. Um. But, yeah.

MR: It’s very, like, some violence is involved. Like, I mean, for people to be passionate and, you know, not agree with someone else's beliefs, like, I mean, you feel like that's very human, but the-the need to kill someone because of that is like so dark and how did we get there, right? I mean, I guess, I don't know. We've alwa- we’ve

always been--. Humans have always (inaudible - 00:51:49) killed one another [Laughs], but it's just like--. That's--. Yeah. I wish that was not the (inaudible - 00:51:55). [Laughs]

DD: Yeah. I--. Yeah, I agree with what everybody is saying. Um, I also have my, like, chosen bubble, I think. But, um, I'm also exposed to the other side of things through, uh, my family, through my parents, and, uh, it-it has forced me to really--. I think- I think I have, like, a lot of--. Like, I'm, you know, I'm-I'm kinda like a 'burn it all down,' like, 'built it all back--.' Like, I feel very, um, radical, in a lot of sense- senses. And then, but as far as this, like, not being able to have any sort of, like, nuance, and this, like shutting people out of our lives, or shutting people down, it's like, I've considered that. After the 2016 election, I considered, you know, disowning, like, not like--. Just--. You know, but it was just--. It took a couple of years to, like, finally have that conversation and to, like, reach across and be like, 'Okay, I need to know why,' you know? Because, um, like, my family isn't like, super politi--. Like, I'm the most politically active, involved, engaged, but it's just became a, you know, learning that people that support Donald Trump have a lot of different reasons for doing so --not that I agree with them-- but sometimes it's just a lack of, like, awareness. And that is, I mean, a huge problem with our media landscape is, you know, how people are getting information, what information they're getting. Because, you know, like, my dad is a small business owner and he thinks that Trump is going to somehow affect his taxes, and that's just like, well, he's not, um [Laughs]. But like, you know, doesn't buy into all the other stuff. But it's just like, I think it's so hard for progressive people that are like, you know, in our bubbles, and, like, thinking about the big picture and every aspect of everything. And there's these people that are just like, 'I care about this one thing and I'm gonna go

with--.' You know, like, it's just- it's just made me realize, like, not everybody--. We can't--. It's just like with any situation like this, as soon as you turn people into monsters, on the left, or on the right, you dehu-dehuman-dehumanize them. And it's just like, you have to, like, recognize, like, the humanity in people to be able to, like, empathize and to be able to h--. I mean, I-I don't know that you can, like really, really change people's minds. I like to think that you can, but it also is just like--. [Pause] Yeah, well, it's complicated.

JR: Well, and it's a lot of it's like a particular kind of labor, you know? And it's like, I think it feels one way to do that kind of labor --at least for me-- to like, be willing to do that kind of labor. Um, for instance, like when my parents or family or friends of my, uh, parents, like, say something that is like casual misogyny or casual racism, like, none of them are, you know, intentionally trying to be, um, racist or misogynist, whatever, and it's like I am- I feel like it's my job to do that labor. But then, when it's, like, something that's more directly impacting me personally, like, my embodiment and everyday existence, it's, like, harder for me to do that labor. Um, uh. Or, I'm, like, less willing to do it after a certain point. Um--.

DD: Because you have to protect yourself.

JR: Yeah, totally. Um. And- and I'm also like--. I noticed --not- this is not a good thing-- but I think I noticed in myself around some, uh, some issues around--. That there are some issues where I'm like- I'm more likely to go into sort of black and white thinking about where I'm like, 'It's just not acceptable to act this way anymore, and if you can't get your shit together and educate yourself, like, I'm done. I'm done, like, trying to do it, because there's no reason to not know this anymore.' Um, which is --again-- it's not

good, it's just I--. Like, something I noticed in myself enough to push myself to be more [Pause] generous around. Or, like, I've questions around: Is it more ethical to be generous? Or--? Like, what--? Like, for me, it's often a question of ethics as like, is generosity always the bet- the most ethical choice? Um, or sometimes is, like, does someone have to feel the consequences of losing you in their life for the decisions that they make, about, you know, their opinions about X, Y, or Z thing? Like, I--. And again, I don't think it's a- it's one or the other, it's a case by case or situation by situation, but it's hard, um, to figure out how to navigate those things in the most ethical, generative ways.

[Pause]

DD: We have two minutes left in here, just a time check.

JR: Okay.

NB: Do we--? Um. Are we going back to, like, the main--?

DD: Yeah, we'll just go back to the main room for, like, a quick goodbye.

NB: Gotcha. I think--? Did they say 1:25? Or--?

DD: Er, they said around one--? Um, well, we could probably head back over there. They just said to do, like, a time check at 1:25 and--.

NB: Oh, okay. Gotcha.

JR: Do you know--? Are they going to force--? That was my--. When I saw it was 1:25, ‘cause Lynn was like, ‘1:25,’ when we were saying, ‘coming back,’ and I was like, ‘Oh, are they gonna force the breakout sessions to end or do we opt in to come back?’

DD: Uh, I don't--. I think we just, like, go back. Yeah, we just, like, lose--. I'm gonna take one--. If everybody wants to smile really quick. [Laughs]

JR: You're gonna take a picture?

DD: I've been taking some screenshots throughout — they asked me to. Um, but I just- in case everybody wanted, like, a nice one 'cause the other ones are--.

MR: Oh, I was probably eating one.

[Laughter]

DD: No, which is good. They- I mean, they want that.

JR: Right, not enough of us are eating, considering.

DD: I know. (inaudible - 00:58:15) I feel bad.

MR: It's very good. I recommend the cornbread.

DD: Damn.

JR: Though, Famida, it would be like a midnight snack or something.

DD: Yeah, what time is there?

JR: Like, 10?

FH: It's 11:30 PM.

DD: Oh.

NB: How did you hear about this? I mean, 'cause we're all Baltimore based, so I'm assuming that's--. But how did you hear about this event?

FH: Uh, I (inaudible - 00:58:40) we were emailed, uh, from the University about this event, um, from the SARCA (inaudible - 00:58:49)--.

JR: She's in our graduate program.

FH: Yes.

NB: What?

JR: She's in our graduate program.

NB: Oh, okay. Okay. Gotcha.

DD: Your first year, right? Yeah.

MR: (inaudible - 00:58:58) That's why no one's at- no one's on campus, right?

NB: Right.

DD: Yeah.

NB: But n--. So normally, you would be at UMBC- you would be in Baltimore if it wasn't for the pandemic?

FH: Yes.

NB: Gotcha.

MR: (inaudible - 00:59:11)

DD: It was really nice--. Oh, sorry.

MR: No, have you all decided about going back in the spring? ‘Cause I know a lot of schools already decided like--.

JR: We’re not. We're--. I mean, which is to say we're doing the same system now where there'll be a small number of hybrid, um, classes, but they're pushing everything to be online — as they should be.

MR: Yeah. [Laughs]

JR: I'll be surprised if we're back in person in the fall to be honest, but--.

MR: Really?

JR: That won't--. Yeah, I just, like, I don't see any end in sight. Like, every state has- is- is- right now, is like--. They're getting massive spikes. I mean, Michigan just everyday for the last, I think, week, they said they have 2700 new infections a day. Like, it's just--. Anyways, like, until we get a different government, like a different, like, group running the government who actually believes in science and, um, wants to protect people from dying, like, it's not--. I don't think it's gonna change. Not to be--. I-I'm sorry. I'm a- I'm a pessimist, but--.

[Laughter]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

DD: It was nice, um, conversing with you all today and meeting people that I hadn't met. Um, I guess we're gonna go back to the main room.

MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Okay.

NB: Bye.

[Main room]

Speaker 1: Totes for so cheap--.

HH: Only for you guys, only for you guys.

Speaker 1: Okay.

HH: It's just because--.

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by Miwa Lee 8/30/2022

To be copyedited.