

File Name: CLT\_042316\_ART1  
Event Date: April 23, 2016  
Location: Charlotte, North Carolina, USA  
Participants:  
RAMONA BIG EAGLE  
MARCUS KISER  
WILLIAM THOMAS  
RYAN WILLIAMS  
Length: 01:14:06

### Preface

*The following conversation was hosted at the McColl Center, facilitated by Heather Hart. 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

RBE: William and--?

MK: Marcus.

RBE: And I'm Ramona.

WT: (inaudible - 00:00:04)

RBE: Yeah.

[Shifting of cards]

RBE: So--.

MK: So we just pass--?

[Unclear sound]

WT: Sure. [Pause and shifting of cards] In our next meeting do we- do we just go ahead--.

RBE: So--.

WT: And say-s-say our own names here in the recording?

MK: Oh, yeah.

WT: Uh, (inaudible - 00:00:24)

MK: You can go first.

WILLIAM THOMAS: I am William Paul Thomas.

MK: Do we have to pick this up?

RBE: I think we can just leave it on the table.

MK: Okay. Hey, Heather. Do we have to, like, pick this up or is that, like, a (inaudible - 00:00:38)? Okay.

HEATHER HART: It'll-it'll pick you up.

MK: Alright. [Clears throat]

RBE: Alright.

WT: (inaudible - 00:00:42)

MARCUS KISER: Alright. I'm Marcus Kiser.

WT: I'm William Paul Thomas.

RAMONA BIG EAGLE: I'm Ramona Big Eagle. [Pause and shifting of cards]. And this is a blank card, so.

MK: Oh.

RBE: Yes. [Pause] Thank you. Okay, okay.

[Shifting of cards]

[Pause]

WT: So mines says, uh, *Discuss artists who co-opt aspects of Black culture for personal gain.*

RBE: Artists that did what?

WT: *Co-opt aspects of Black culture for personal gain.*

RBE: Okay.

[Pause]

WT: I guess if you talkin' about, like, on a scale that's, like, national or international, we know folks like Iggy Azalea has been like-like called out, and stuff like that. Like, uh, Miley Cyrus [Pause] Macklemore.

MK: I'm tryna think of, um, any visual artists. [Pause] Um, ch, 'cause all I know is, like, hip hop artists.

WT: Yeah.

MK: But, like, musicians in general--.

WT: Right.

MK: That's just benefiting off of Black culture.

WT: Right.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

MK: You know, taking advantage of it. Um, [Clears throat] but that's always, like, a tricky question, especially when it comes to hip hop, because if someone's decent at what they do to that only just be for Black people--. Because like, the other way around,

like, say, like, if I was a good country musician, would they count me as like, benefiting off of their culture or whatnot? So, that's always a super tricky question for me.

RBE: I don't personally know, or know of, any artists that have--. Read the question one more time.

WT: Yes, ma'am.

RBE: [Laughs] So I can stay (inaudible - 00:02:54).

WT: Yup, yup. *Dis-discuss artists who co-opt aspects of Black culture for personal gain.*

RBE: Okay, I don't know of any artists, or know any personally, that have done that. Now, I guess I need to say at the onset that, um--. As I said, my name is Ramona Big Eagle. I'm a, um, card carrying, red-born Native American from the Tuscarora tribe. And so I know that there are people that have looked at me and asked me, 'What are you doing here?' Okay [Laughs]. So, um--. And, um, my mom's Tuscarora from the Tuscarora tribe, my father's Cherokee. Um, but I also know that people take you as you look, so because I walked in both of those roads, red road and black road, I just go to every event that's red, Black, white, whatever.

WT: Mm-hmm.

RBE: Um, but because the way I look, there are a lot of people that feel like I benefit from the Native culture without being Native, because they go by looks and not by blood. Um, and I just always have told my children that's their issue, it's not my issue at all. You know, I know who I am. Um, I'm, as I said, I'm, um--. In the Native culture, you have to have a tribal card to be legitimate — quote-unquote: legitimate. So, because I am a card carrying, um, Native American, I always have been, didn't just

decide when it was cool to be one when it was shameful I was one. And I got called all kinds of names--. I've been called every name for the red side, the Black side, you name it. Um, so, um, I understand that question. I just don't know, personally, of people that have benefited, um, in that way.

WT: But you mentioned card carrying?

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: Is that something that-that--.

RBE: Yes.

WT: That Native--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: Americans- that indigenous folks have, like--.

RBE: Right.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

WT: Imposed themselves? Or where did that--.

RBE: No, no.

WT: Come from?

RBE: I was just gonna say, here in the United States of America, I can call myself white. I clearly don't look it, but I could call myself white, and people would just look at me like I was crazy, but they wouldn't ask for any proof or anything. You know what I mean? They wouldn't even think about asking for proof; they just think 'She's crazy' or whatever. Or because, you know, 'Maybe with those eyes maybe she is, I don't know.' I can call myself Black; I would not be asked for any proof--.

WT: Mm.

RBE: Whatsoever.

WT: Yeah.

RBE: Okay? The minute you say that you're Native American, you're immediately asked, uh, 'Oh, do you have a card? Um, what tribe?' Okay? Native American Indian people are the only people here in the United States- I mean, the United States of America, that have to prove who we are. We have to prove who we are: our lineage, our bloodline. And then as a result of proving who you are, you're then given a tribal card that says, 'This person has proved through blood quantum, through registration with their tribe, that they are a bonafide Native American Indian. So people that don't have a card, um, just as much as someone that does have a card, you know, as far as blood and everything like that, are considered not bonafide. And that's a sickness here in this country that's been imposed upon Native Americans as a result of the government; way back when, when the land was being taken, that kind of situation. So, um, as a result, there were people from the same family, one that had straighter hair than another, so they were considered Native Americans; and ones that had curly hair were considered: 'Oh, well you can't be Native.' So, in the same family, they were classified as non-Native. So, it's just meant- position by the government that, um, tribes have had to follow and have adopted, um, just because of governmental benefits and assistance that the government gives, based on that card. So, it's a crazy situation.

WT: Part of what your--. Uh, uh, the connection that I've seen between for both that y'all have described like in terms of music, and culture, or ethnicity, I feel like it's a question about the authentic--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: Authentic--.

RBE: Authenticity.

WT: Authenticity. Thank you.

RBE: Yeah, you're right.

WT: Um, and who gets to say what's authentic or not? So--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

WT: When we talk about musicians, if-if somebody is an-an artist, a visual- or music or otherwise, w-what do we know about the origins of the culture that they belong to? Or their connections to that culture and their affiliations that helps us determine whether or not they real or not, right? Like--.

MK: Yeah.

WT: Like, how do we know- how do we make those assessments? And who gets to say, you know, what is authentic? And so I think that's an interesting question. It's like, yeah, we talking about co-opting Black culture. Um, what is authentic Black culture? And have-have the artists that we, um, become witness to what they do, have they displayed any aspects of a-authenticity--.

MK: Yeah.

WT: Of realness--.

MK: [Clears throat]

WT: Of what they do?

RBE: So why do things- why does art have to be divided into Black art? Or, you know, w-wha-who-who imposes that and why? And why do we still go by that?

MK: And that's what I was gonna go to next. Um, because even within this Black art world, there's still a box that we're put in as being 'Black artists'. Um, like we were talking about the-the art talk in Portland, like the guy was like, 'You're not Black enough', or 'That's not Black.' And it's like, how do you--? That's the thing that we're fighting against, too.

WT: Right.

MK: Um, [Pause] there's so many ways you can take the answers to this, because, um, 'cause I'm in the creative field. Uh, that's my partner over there. So we both- we do a lot of marketing--.

RGB: Mm-hmm.

MK: Graphic design, programming stuff. [Clears throat] And we're always called upon to be in these agents-agencies and always getting hired to do what's hype and cool.

WT: Right.

MK: Always. Like, I, uh, like- I've done tons of stuff for, like, different agencies. 'Hey, what's the new and in?' Whatever it is, it's like whatever that Black culture or that hip hop ear to the streets is - whatever that is, whether it's like--. And you see, um, Iggy Azalea taking advantage of it, [Clears throat] Miley Cyrus, whatever these young kids are doing, it's normally something that reflects on to like, Black culture. But then you gotta like, ask yourself, like, what is Black culture?

WT: Right.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

MK: Like, what-what is it just because it's like whatever's hip? Is that known? Is that what's Black? But I know, like, me and Jason are getting picked all the time. Like, even, like, I've turned down, like, so many job opportunities because, like, I turned down a job at E.S.P.N. You know, and they were just like, 'Hey, we've-we've been looking at--.' And they-they contacted me, they was just like, 'Yo, we've been seeing the stuff you've been doing. Could you, like, bring that here?' And I'm just, like, it just didn't feel right. [Laughs] Like, It just--.

WT: They-they trust you to have, like, I don't want to say, like, your ear to the streets. Whatever, they trust that you're-what you're doing is-is a reflection of cool, a reflection of auth-authenticity.

MK: A reflection- a reflection of cool. And the crazy part about it is, like... once they get that, and it's kind of, like, it's just, like, thrown out the door like, 'Oh, so that's what it is.' 'Cause I've also been in that situation to where it's like, now they get what you're trying to do, but by the time they get it, you're all into somethin' else. You're on to, like, the next 'new thing' or whatnot. It's like, 'Oh, sorry. Your position's been terminated today.'

WT: Wow.

MK: Along the lines like that. So--.

WT: So that's part of why those boxes exist, because it's, like, is it cause it's marketable? Because it's easier to market things when you can, like, uh, label it or, uh, or--?

RBE: Yeah, cater to a s-s-specific group.

MK: But to be honest, I think sometimes we put ourselves in a lot of those boxes.

WT: (inaudible - 00:11:40).

MK: Um [Pause] I think a lot of those boxes and stereotypes come from, like-  
come from, like, our--.

RBE: Self-imposed.

MK: Own culture.

WT: Right.

MK: Yeah. And I think sometimes, um, it happens and it happens with the  
generational gaps.

WT: How come?

MK: So, um, 'cause the younger culture versus, like, the old--. Like my dad  
wouldn't understand, like, Iggy Azalea, or whatnot.

WT: Right.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MK: So, um, he's got--.

RBE: Your dad.

MK: Him growing up. [Laughs] H-him growing up is different from us, boy. You  
know, like, so he's got this idea of what 'Black' was. And then like, we got this idea of,  
like, what, Bla- i--. You know, 'cause we grew up in a hip-hop generation, or like, my dad  
grew up in- listening to Jimi Hendrix, and that- and then my granddad listening to, like,  
Ella Fitzgerald.

[Crosstalk]

RBE: Jimmy Smith.

MK: Yeah, and that--.

RBE: And Ella Fitzgerald--.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: Right.

MK: [Clears throat] And then, like--. But to me, like, it's all- to me it's all gorgeous.

WT: Gorgeous, yeah.

MK: [Laughs] Like--. And it's just--.

WT: And it's all valid.

MK: And I think--.

[Crosstalk ends]

WT: Yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MK: And I say we put ourselves in that because I feel like it's also up to, like, us, the younger generations [Clears throat] in which we like. This is bad ab-about the younger generations, like we rarely go back [Clears throat] and research that stuff. We just take whatever it is now and start it from there, like, 'Oh, well I'm just gonna start from-from, uh, T.I. or whatever.' Like, nothing existed--. But W-Wu-Tang. So, like, I think it's important for us to understand, like, that history and to, like, keep that stuff going.

WT: I think that's an important point, 'cause I think you-if you point out, like, say Wu-Tang, or any hip hop artists that we, like, kind of grew up on and respect what they

do, you look at those artists, you look at the producers, the musicians, and they're looking at those people, right? Like, what their--.

MK: Yeah.

WT: Parents grew up on, looking at what the--.

MK: Understand what inspired them.

WT: And so, if you are looking closely at somebody, you--. Someone's artistry, who you admire is- it seems like it's not hard to see what they were inspired by, like what their influences were. And so I think that's one way of closing that gap, is that w-when you realize the complexity of, um, what the artists who you look to who are doing, like, quality work--.

MK: Yeah.

WT: What they're looking at, you see, like, that is-that is a-a lineage that it belongs to--.

MK: Yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

WT: And not just somebody just stumbled upon somebody-something amazing. It's like they-they were listening and they were seeing, um, what came before them. So I think--. Yeah, but I would agree that sometimes the younger generation--. We can't be, like, lazy about, um, doing that research or looking closer at where that's- where some of th-those influences are coming from.

MK: Yeah, and we-and we are, like, really--. 'Cause I guess now I'm at the stage where I feel like I'm kind of in the middle.

WT: Yeah.

MK: Um, 'cause I'm not super young, but I'm not super old.

WT: Mm-hmm.

MK: [Clears throat] But I used to, when I was younger, I used to be angry that, like, the older generations didn't understand. But I felt like it's, like, our job now is to, like, bridge that gap.

WT: Right.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

MK: Because I guess maybe because I'm feel- I feel like I'm in the middle now. So I f- I don't feel bad about explaining--. I just left a class teaching some younger kids in high school, and we're talking about music. [Clears throat] And every time I teach, I talk to these kids. It-it-it always goes further than art. It just-I just go into, like, life. [Laughs] Like, what are we- what are we doing? So, um--. And it-and it started with music. And they were just talking about these younger, like, acts that are out now like Young Thug and all of this stuff--.

WT: (inaudible - 00:15:14) Chief Keef?

MK: [Laughs] Chief Keef, and Weeknd--. And, you know, and I have to explain to them, like, 'Okay, that stuff is cool. And I do know about that stuff, but look this up. And look this-- like, look the generation that we're in.' I don't even know how old you are. I only--.

WT: I'm-I'm thirty one.

MK: Okay, so I'm a little older. That, like--.

RBE: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

MK: I'm thirty eight.

RBE: And I'm sixty one [Chuckles].

MK: [Chuckles] So I'm like, 'Look this up.'

WT: Yeah.

MK: 'Look it up, and then look up-look up Ella Fitzgerald--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MK: Or like, look up- and then look up, uh, the stuff that we were coming up on. So, like--. And-and, you know, and they're just like--. Oh. Like, I was telling them we-the-a-a girl today about the Weeknd. I was like, 'You should look up Michael Jackson, *Off The Wall*.' She was like, 'Really?' I was like, 'Yeah, he's just like that', and she didn't--. She had no clue. So, like, just trying to bridge those gaps and like--.

WT: It is interesting. I feel like I am, uh, get approaching that-that middle area. Um, even just being thirty one in terms of seeing- you guys said what fifteen year olds are listening to compared to what I might have been listening to fifteen years--.

MK: Yeah.

WT: Ago and what they're familiar with. And it is sort of--. I mean, like, you remember how Missy Elliott when she performed at the, uh--.

MK: Super Bowl.

WT: Super Bowl with Katy Perry and you-- uh-uh, social media went crazy about, like, uh, a lot of young people saying 'Who is this new artist or whatever--?'

MK: Yeah.

WT: 'She gon' be big whatever.' So just something like that, where you think, 'Okay. I was in, maybe, like, middle school or high school when Missy Elliott was hot. But, er, so now it's a generation of-of-of, uh, young people that don't even- didn't even realize who she was until that performance and so, um, I'm--. Yeah, I feel like I am in a area and in terms, like, seeing how pop music maybe or, um, popular culture is now being mostly consumed by a generation that I don't necessarily, like, belong to anymore, having to, like, maybe play catch up when I work with students about like what-what is-what is hot, or what is, um, most, uh, valuable in terms of what they see in a-in art. Um, do you teach also?

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

RBE: Well, I was gonna ask you the same thing, William. What do you do? I-I am a teacher. I'm a, um- well, I'm a college professor, but I'm also a teaching artist. My art form is storytelling. I'm a legend keeper from our reservation, so I preserve, present, and promote Native American Indian culture through storytelling, dancing, drumming, singing, artifact presentation and — mainly of course, the storytelling. And one of the biggest things I do is I dispel myths. Just when I show up on the scene, I dispel myths. [Laughs] So--. And stereotypes, as well as tell myths. So, what do you do?

[RBE intermittently agrees]

WT: Um, my day job: I am an a, uh, an administrator in the department of Art at U.S.C. Chapel Hill. So, I do, uh, new student services where one of m--. Um, part of why I'm here- that I'm an- I'm an artist. So, uh, I often work with other folks on workshops with students, and I've-I've taught while I was in grad school, and after grad

school I at, um, local art centers. And so, when it comes to education, and most of my experience has been through these smaller workshops, like shorter term workshops. So, like summer camps and, um, weekend workshops that I've worked with middle school and high school students on. Um, and I guess I've done that regularly enough, where I'm noticing-- Yeah. My-my age difference between- you know, me and a, eh, uh, and a twelve year old and the difference in terms of what we're consuming into what- what we're familiar with. Um, so that's the capacity that I'm finding- that I'm figuring out what those gaps are, yes. Um, so I don't know how far we're, like, diverging from that original, uh, point. But... um, honestly, it's-it's interesting, you know, dialogue.

RBE: Uh-huh.

MK: Yeah. Maybe we got off topic a little [Laughs].

WT: It's alright.

MK: [Chuckles]

RBE: It's alright.

WT: Um--.

RBE: It's all good.

WT: Do we- do we kind of, like, move through, like, a-as- just as we fit?

MK: I guess we can just--.

RBE: Exactly.

MK: Pick and choose, um-. I saw your cards, *A moment*.

RBE: Mm. Yeah, my card said, *Give a moment of silence for Prince*.

MK: [Chuckles]

RBE: Um, truly an artist and just so talented to have died so young.

MK: Yes.

RBE: So, a moment of silence for him.

[Speakers pause and take moment of silence]

WT: You know, I think, um, that's an interesting one 'cause we was just talking about, like, the impact that Prince has had, or not, um, uh, on a certain generation enough to, like--. So, I heard you say that 'Purple Rain' came out in '84.

RBE: Mm.

[Crosstalk]

MK: Mid 80s--.

WT: (inaudible - 00:20:07)

MK: Or somethin' like that.

WT: I was in there.

MK: Like that. Yeah.

WT: So I--.

RBE: It was in my age.

[Crosstalk ends]

WT: I was born in '85, right. So, I didn't see 'Purple Rain' until I was in college. Like, my, um, girlfriend show-showed it to me. And I think I was familiar with Prince through, like, my mom and dad, like, listenin' to--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: Prince. And I, don't know, think, like, the impact was-is not anything close to what I've seen, or what I've heard over the past couple of days from people like they-the kind of, um... the-the level at which he-he affected people. What I think I've-what I've respected, I guess, is for any artist to have that kind of r-reach like that, where you can never have met that person and their-what they m-produce. It's like the--. N-one: that you know about it; two: that it, like, affects you in some way. And I, as an artist, I feel like I hope to affect people on a-on a similar scale, or as (inaudible - 00:20:59) to get even close to that, or to-to make something that-that moves people.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: Um, and I'm- we're working in a different format, uh, as visual artists, um, or storytellers maybe than-than a musician, uh, does, but I think the work we-we do can, and does, like, im-impact folks. And so I think about that, the fact that somebody--.  
[Clears throat] When he was at the-the height of what he was doing, or-or at the- in the 80s or whatever, that I was, like, not born yet. Yet, like... that that's the- that that's come back to me--.

MK: Yeah.

WT: Y'know, in-in some way.

MK: And one thing I want to add to that is, um, at least he's built his legacy, and he's left his--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

MK: Beautiful body of artwork. Um, so I'm just happy he's left that and made himself immortal, just about, so.

WT: Right.

RBE: Um, uh, I have to tell you I don't really listen to, or really never have listened to all that much secular music or anything like that, so I'm--.

MK: 'Kay.

RBE: Not really up with the scene. So, I look at Prince from a different standpoint.

MK: Yeah.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

RBE: Um, as an artist, I am just so astounded at his, um, economical prowess. I'm just proud that this young Black man had his economics, his finances together. I mean, I don't know if he had a will or not, so it might be going all to his sister, I don't know. But the fact that he owned his music, and the company's, you know, that in itself is a phenomenon, I think, among artists of color. So see, I don't mean just Black artists, I mean, Black artists, Latino artists, red artists- you don't hear about that happening.

MK: You never do.

RBE: It's usually the Man that owns it and you're just producing it and all, but--. I mean, the fact that he owned it, it was his and--. I mean, that's just great. You know, and I-I've-I've read all this because of, you know, all the publicity and everything. The other stuff didn't really interest me all that much, but the financial part really stood out to me. I was just really impressed, and I thought, 'Okay, this is a smart man.'

MK: In his, uh--.

RBE: He died too young.

MK: I was reading about his philanthropy e-efforts today--.

RBE: Mm-hmm. Yes.

MK: Too. All the stuff that he did for the community--.

RBE: Exactly.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

MK: I had no clue. And they say because he was a Jehovah's Witness, and he wasn't--.

RBE: He didn't want to.

MK: Bragging about it. But, um--. I mean, I think that was a beautiful thing, 'cause I can say I didn't listen to that much Prince music outside of 'Purple Rain', but um, and I've really-I rarely listened to that. But, um, yeah, I think that's amazing.

RBE: Mm-hmm. Definitely so. Definitely so.

[Pause]

MK: [Clears throat] So I'll go. You want me to read my question?

WT: For sure.

MK: *Discuss an artist's role in the colonization of historically Black neighborhoods.*

RBE: So what do you mean when you say *The colonization of Black neighborhoods*? 'Cause, you know, the word--. Keep in mind, every-thing we say — as a storyteller, I'm always mindful of the fact that different words have different connotations and meanings to people based on their upbringing, their perspective, their culture. When you say to me, as a Native American person, 'colonization', I have a totally different meaning--.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: And context for that. So that's why I asked what do you mean when you say *colonization of Black communities and neighborhoods*?

MK: Um, I think that our contexts are similar because I was thinking the same way. I was thinking along the lines of, like, gentrification--.

WT: Right.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

MK: Um [Pause] because I don't--. Let's just go along the lines of gentrification, or like the meanings that--. 'Cause how did you take it?

WT: I've-I've took it--.

MK: The same way?

[RBE intermittently agrees]

WT: The same way. Gentr-gentrification was the first word I thought about--. And, like, um, I guess as far as what artists have to do with it, I guess we have different roles depending on our-our- what our desires might be. It--. So, maybe the first thing I thought about if you're gonna go in and do design or meal projects, or whatever it is. Uh, if you're getting paid from, um, helping along that gentrification project, are you, like, complicit with it happening? Like, you would, like, receiving a check to help, um, further that process? Are you saying that you're in agreeance with-with, um, this-that displacement? Like, if-if somebody invites you to, um, [Pause] to lend your skills to that? Th-do you turn down the project on-on an ethical basis? Or do you think, like, 'I need to make ends meet just like any other artist or whatever. So this is something that I'm gonna, like, you know, uh, take-take part in?' Um, and do you-do you live in an area that is being gentrified? Are you, like, looking for h, uh, for housing? And then--. So,

what's-what's the difference between, um, uh-uh, say, my-my income now, and maybe the income of, um, someone that might have been displaced from, uh, a certain neighborhood? And so, I guess I think about that. Like, in what capacity am I a part of that process of colonization or gentrification? Is that something that you- that you all, like, feel like y'all have to contend with, uh, here? Do y'all both live in Charlotte?

RBE: I live here. I've been here for thirty-some years.

WT: M'kay. And I live in Chapel Hill.

MK: Yeah, I'm born and raised in Charlotte.

RBE: Really, you're born and raised?

MK: Yeah.

RBE: Look at you. I don't meet--.

MK: [Laughs]

RBE: Many people that are born and raised here.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MK: So this is an interesting question. Um... I do a lot of community work. Um, a lot of unsung stuff, a lot of undocumented stuff. [Clears throat] And I grew at a-in-I grew up in, uh, I grew up in Hidden Valley and, uh, Druid Hills, which is, like, two blocks up the street. Um... and even now, like, I don't live in those places anymore, but I make sure to visit those places frequently. Um, I w-I was just in Druid Hills this morning. I'm always going back to the old neighborhood, making sure--. Knowing, like, keeping my ear to the streets; knowing what's going on; knowing, like, what they're building; knowing, like, whatever mural projects and, um--. Like, I was just at the barber shop this

morning, which is like that. The barber shop I go to, that guy gave me my first haircut. And it's been around for, like, fif- like, forty years. So, um--. And you know, like, my family knows his family and it just goes back. But now I'm looking at this--. And everything's older, and it's ran down, and I'm constantly--. And I don't-I don't mean to say 'the hood', but that's just how--. I call it 'the hood'. I'm constantly in the hood talking to these younger guys, talking to the older guys making sure, like, they understand, like, finances, and I'm making sure they understand gentrification. Um, and I, you know, I'm not rich or anything, so I'm just making sure that they have their stuff together. And, like, having them understand the importance of, like, owning property and, like, keeping the cul--. Like you said, preserving that culture that's already there. And, um, I do- I do a lot of that stuff. And actually, um, I'm in the- I'm in- I'm in the process of creating a-a non-profit marketing company so I could deal with a lot of, like, urban non-profits. Um, and also, I started residence-residency here in August. So, part of that-part of my community engagement is, um--. I really do want to bring in these younger Black kids, or kids of color, and, like, have them understand the importance of, like, what's happening in Charlotte because I've seen Charlotte--. I remember this used to be the hood. Like, where the coliseum is at, it's all, like, hood, so--.

[Crosstalk]

RBE: I grew up near here, so you're like--.

MK: Okay.

RBE: I've seen it--.

MK: I remember--. Yeah. I remember--.

RBE: Some years.

[Crosstalk ends]

MK: Yeah, the square and all that, but, like, I'm all about, like... ec-economic improvement in the- in these places. So like, um--. And I guess that's what I'm building on now. And I got- I'm trying to build a team. First off, I'm bringing a team of like fifty designers in color to make sure the district. So, um because I'm all of, like--. Again, I'm always in these marketing firms. I'm always, like, the only Black person and I'm like, 'Man, well there's gotta be--.'

WT: Who you pulling from when you go to do a project with fifty designers? Like, so where-where would that--?

MK: Oh, I haven't found fifty yet.

WT: Ok-Okay.

MK: I probably got ten [Laughs] right now, so--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

MK: I might get twenty.

WT: Okay.

MK: So this fifty--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: That's still--.

MK: Was an exaggeration.

WT: Amazing though, y'know what I mean?

MK: But yeah, just-just--.

WT: 'Cause you-. I find that, uh, being an artist in Chapel Hill, even a Black artist or an artist of color, um, that the events that I go to, the things that always--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: It--. We--. Maybe there's one or two other Black--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: Artists unless--.

RBE: Right.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

WT: They're in an event like this, right?

MK: You have to have that- you have to have that-that presence, that, um, presence of, like, color. You know, like, y--it can't-- and I'm always--. Like, I love, like, how you say 'preserving your culture', because, like, that stuff would disappear so quick, and I-and I see it happening in Charlotte. Like, people don't know- people don't even know what was going on ten years ago. Like--. And you know, like, we all live in NoDa; I was in NoDa with, um, her back then. And I remem-- we got kicked out because of gentrification, like. And we all had to move, disperse, and now it's, like, all super richy or whatnot. But, um, just tryna keep that culture and preserve it. Um, that's a huge thing I'm working on [Laughs]. [Pause] Crying Jordan, man.

[Laughter]

MK: 'Cause I just get way off topic on that.

WT: No, no. I-I-I feel like that was, uh-uh--. You talked about what the artist's role is- what your role has been in terms of, um--. I feel like breaking up some of that process that's happening.

MK: Yeah.

WT: Like--.

MK: I think it's--.

WT: Topics of, like, the making people aware of--.

MK: Bringing awareness, yeah.

WT: Yeah, yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MK: And ma--. Yeah, because I think that's really important. Especially from the terms of, like, us creators, because I love, like, people don't think the way we think. You know, like--. And now I'm in whole different- I'm in a whole different mindset. Not only from a creative mindset, but, like, I'm, like, dealing with, like, finances now. You know, I'm like, stock trading and stuff like that, and making sure they're, like, financially, we're straight, too. 'Cause, you know, like, so, you know, like-like we know what we're doin' out here. I'm at the barber shop every week, man. That's just like--.

WT: That's-that's when--.

RBE: That's the place to be, the barber shop.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: My dad was a barber, that's--.

MK: Okay.

RBE: How I knew that.

WT: Nice.

RBE: Yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MK: Like every week, I'm back in the hood, and just, like--. And they're always like, 'Yo, why- you don't have to come here. You know, like-like, why you always back here?' There's, like, two or three hoods I'm always in, like, just making sure that everybody's straight. Um, you know, like, making sure kids are going to college, you know, like, helping them out on their projects and stuff like that.

WT: That's everything to me, man, is that you-you've made--. Just knowing you just--. Today, right. We just met in person f- today for the first time, and I get the sense that you've been able to do some really great things--.

MK: Yeah.

WT: In your own life, but that you haven't forgotten about, um--.

MK: You can't forget.

WT: People that have walked the same path as you or might--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: Not have walked the same path — people that need a hand in some way, one way or another, just like could benefit from the information that you've--.

MK: Yeah.

WT: Acquired thus far. And I think it's something to be said about us, uh, as artists, sharing what information that we've a-acquired on our own paths, you know, like, uh--.

MK: Yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

WT: As a show of what possibilities there are, and so they're-the kids in the neighborhood, cats at the barber shop that they--. By- do, uh, you going and chopping up with him, and, um, having those conversations is-is--. I feel like that's useful information to have that-that otherwise, like, if-if so- if you just go and do what you do and, like, be as successful as you can be and don't share that that's a missed opportunity and I guess so that you still have that kind of, uh, connection to those communities, I think is-is-is everything.

MK: And I try to keep as much as of a connection with especially the younger crowd as I can. Before I met you guys today, I was actually talking--. I've been volunteering at, uh, this arts program and it's all females. And I just been helping them understand, like, branding. Today, I talked to them about comic art, you know, just teaching them about the comic industry. And, um, now I'm just trying to get more young brothers in there, you know?

WT: What's the age range of that group?

MK: They're all high school. They're, like, um, late middle school to high school.

WT: Okay.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MK: Um, like, I would say fourteen to seventeen. So, um--. And then just doing stuff like that and, like, even-- like, I just started a new job like a month ago working for, uh- I work for the N.C.A.A. I just design, like, women's apparel for sports teams. But, um, I missed it last month when I couldn't start because of a job, but I promised them that--. You know, and they were just like, 'Hey, like, what? Like, how much do you want? Like, can we just pay you?', and I was like, 'It was never about the money.' Like, it's more so about that legacy. And, like, I feel, like, these younger kids need to see brothers — like, especially brothers, man. Like brothers in there because we get dogged e-[Laughs]-everywhere. Like, brothers never get- like, we always gettin' dogged by, like, media or like whatnot, whatever. So I think it's important for them to see somebody out here grinding, or somebody out here taking the right steps, somebody being, like, a positive role model that ain't a rapper. [Laughs] You know, I'm not a rapper, I'm just an- I'm a artist designer. Let them know that that's cool. Let them know that they can make a living off that, too, or whatever. Like, I don't tell them to be artists, I just tell them to be good people.

WT: You talked about that-that demographic or that just this group coming in that they're- you usually go to events with that's mostly--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: Women art--.

RBE: Yeah.

WT: More and more women artists than there are men.

RBE: Exactly. That's true.

MK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WT: Um, so that's-that's interesting. Um, and I feel like any, you know, art center thing that I'm involved in, or arts events, I do notice that like, usually does seem to be a more-more of a concentration of women, and so--.

RBE: It's true.

MK: It's hard to get the brothers out, man.

WT: Yeah--.

MK: It's hard.

WT: I mean, it's th--. Yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RBE: I was just gonna say, also in relationship to this right here, um, and you brought up a really good point; you asked a question and that's what started a whole conversation: do we participate in that because of the money? Or do we turn it down? Now, my thought has always been, and my role, what I've actually lived out is that I'm not in agreement with it. So, if I'm hired in a situation in a community that I see being displaced, and like you said, I've been here in Charlotte long enough to see, um, third ward, fourth ward change dramatically. And, um--. So I feel like someone has to speak up to it in the process of preserving culture, presenting it, and promoting it. You know, I love doing, um--. I-I'm a storyteller, or a historian, and also with my reservation and just in general. So I love asking people when — I do a lot of volunteer work, and I love asking my participants, and I usually have all ages, you know, 'What was here before this park was here? What was here before that nice shiny apartment building was here?' and 'How would you know,? How are you going to find out?' You know, and they always go, 'I don't know what was here.' They go, 'Because there were houses here,

there were people that lived here.' I had a grandmother that lived down Mint Street, you wouldn't know it now because Mint Street [Laughs]--. You got the, um, Catholic diocese that were-that, um, dioceses, the Catholic building, that's where my aunt and grandmother's house used to be. And I go, 'It's so changed now.' I said, 'So everything that those people-- our grandparents, our elders-- worked for, their legacy is us, 'cause actual physical buildings and things- it's all gone.' So you would think that it's gone--. You know, there's nothing left of them. There's no legacy left I said, but the legacy is in us. I said, 'Just like we're talking about this right now, fifty years from now, who's to say that where you live, people be saying, 'What needs to be here before this big, um, complex was here? This apartment, um, high rise was here?' I said, 'So it's important that people in place are never forgotten that it goes on because you continue the story, the story is a part of who you are. And you continue that. You continue to talk about it. So it might be this way today, but it wasn't always this way. And it will be forgotten if you don't continue that- if you don't carry that legacy on.' You know, within the storytelling world and, you know, just in general, we believe that, um, our elders, our ancestors still live on because of the stories that we are still sharing today. But if we don't tell those stories, they die out, because we are the ones that aren't telling. We have to tell those stories, we got to preserve, promote and present that culture through the mere act of talking, dialogue, storytelling with each other, reminding young people of — it's not just about today, and we've been talking about that all along with even the other questions. It's not just about what we see and what we hear today, but there was a bridge that all that are ar- here right now came over from the past, what was done, to get to where they are today, whether they realize it or not. It's a building block upon a foundation that

some don't even know about. And the only reason they don't know about us is because we don't keep talking about, we don't keep it alive and I think it's incumbent upon us to do just that, to keep it alive with the stories, with the dialogue, with the, um, you know, just the communication that we have with young people. And in the case where you're called upon, I think, to take part in a project that you might not necessarily agree with. I've been called upon to do projects that I didn't agree with the whole premise that brought them to the point of asking someone that no longer lived in their community, come in, as you know- whether it was out of guilt or whatever. So I feel like it's very important that as a result, when you are called upon a project that-that you don't turn it down but you gladly accept it, and you make such a bold statement because of the legacies inside of you that they can't help but remember. They can't help but say, 'Oh, wow.' You know, not just 'Wow' because it's good art, but 'Wow' because it bridges that past which that neighborhood might-would tend to make you totally forget. It bridges that past to the present, so they can't forget. So that's why I think it's so important that we do take advantage of opportunities like that, even to the point when we're not invited, we're not offered a seat at the table, we speak up and say, 'Hey, why wasn't I invited to this table? I-I have grandparents that lived here. I have a stake in this neighborhood, I cut my first teeth on this neighborhood right here. I had my first haircut in this neighborhood right here. You know, I went to elementary school that's no longer here. But I grew up in this neighborhood, I-I feel like I should be a part of it because this neighborhood would not still be preserved, even though it's enhanced and, um, in the different ways it has been, but it would not even be here if it wasn't for my relatives, my elders, my ancestors, that kept it going at the time when they did.' So I-I think our voice

has to be heard even with this- whether it's invited or not, we've got to speak up and keep that dialogue, that story going. Keep the legacy going.

MK: Um... And it's weird because, um--. [Pause] When I said I got my first haircut, I don't even--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

MK: Have hair now.

WT: [Laughter]

MK: But, like, um--. And I guess, for me, I-I feel like, um--. And maybe sometimes this like a-a weak point, but I feel like I got a responsibility to Charlotte.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

MK: You know, knowing that I've been here, born--.

RBE: Yeah.

MK: And raised.

RBE: I agree.

MK: Everything about me is Charlotte.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MK: Everything you love, everything you hate — not saying there's a lot of people that hate me or anything, but, um- but, like, even, like, um--. 'Cause I had a couple insane job offers to leave and I turned them all down because I want- I felt like I still needed- like I still feel like there's work to be done here. And I feel like I'm, like, a huge part of that work that needs to be done. Um, and people are like, 'Man, you're

cra--.' I turned down, like, E.S.P.N. was gonna move me to Connecticut, paid for my move, create a position for me, six figures. I didn't do it. I turned down another marketing gig in Atlanta. They were like, 'You come down here tomorrow. Fifty dollars an hour, overtime.' But I was like, 'Man, I'm- I can't leave.' Like it's too many p--. I feel like there's too many people depending on me and that are, like, there's gonna need my help too, like--. And maybe, and I see this, like, huge influx of, like, change comin', and I feel like I need to be here, to be a voice for those people. Um--.

RBE: I totally understand that.

MK: Because-because they're not- because they're not gettin' into the McColl Center. Like, they don't have a national- we gotta- I got a national-- they don't have a national--. They-th-they have no clue. They have no clue on, like--. And I feel like I'm so- I'm such an important figure to, like, those kids are just left. I'm such an important figure to, like, Druid Hills to, like, Hidden Valley, you know, and I'm trying to like, be like, an example for them. And I just felt like, you know, I listened to the universe and, like, the--. I was like, 'It's not-it's not the time for me to- it's not time for me to leave yet.' And plus, I know that stuff will always be there. But I was like, 'I need to be hands on, I need to, like, be here to fight these battles with those people. And, um, and luckily, y-you know, like, I'm now-I'm finally gettin' to a position to where I have those, like, resources, like you said, to help- when to help bridge that gap between the older generations and the younger generations, and then preserve those stories. So, um--.

RBE: You're right, so true.

MK: When people are like, 'You're crazy. You turn down all that money', but--.

[Crosstalk]

WT: That's lo- that's loyalty, man--.

MK: At some point--.

WT: And-and it shows how-the kind of impact that the city has had on you like, like, what is- what it must have given you to feel that, uh, connected to it that you wouldn't leave for a super comfortable kind of position, like-like--.

MK: And you know--.

WT: It'd be--.

MK: Yeah.

WT: Great.

MK: And I needed the money at one--.

WT: Right, right.

MK: Point. I was like, 'Man, I should've just--.'

WT: So that's saying--.

MK: 'Left', you know, but--.

WT: Something about your--. Yeah, yeah. The way that you care--.

[Crosstalk ends]

MK: But instead it's the integrity is, you know, like--. And plus, I still believe, like, I believe in, like- I believe in the city. I believe in the arts scene here--.

RBE: Right.

MK: I believe in my team of fifty [Laughs] graphic designers--.

RBE: Uh-huh.

MK: That I'm gonna build.

WT: Right, right.

RBE: Right.

MK: So, um, so--.

RBE: And then let's also say this, too, for the record. I'm touched because of that entrepreneur spirit that we have--.

WT: Mm.

RBE: As artists. You know, I've always worked all my life for myself: I started my first company, my first business, which I still have to this day, I started in fourth grade. I knew in fourth grade I wanted to be an entrepreneur just because my dad was an entrepreneur, my mom was a teacher — I knew I never want to be a teacher--.

MK: [Chuckles]

RBE: But, you know, just 'cause what kid wants to come home with homework every night? So--. But you know, I knew then in fourth grade I wanted to be an entrepreneur. I never worked for anyone until this year because I'm writing a book --I-I'm an author and I write-- and I'm writing book on --a-another one, 'yet another one' as my children say-- on entrepreneurship, my children go: 'How old were you can write a book on entrepreneurship when that's all you know? You've never worked for anyone.'

WT: Right.

RBE: And I got to thinking about that, and I thought, 'You know, that's the point; I haven't ever worked for anyone.' So I have a one year project, June 29, is my last day--.

WT: [Laughs]

RBE: Working for someone else.

MK: [Chuckles]

RBE: I have worked a nine to five for the first time in my life for the past ten months. I have two more months to go, and I'm holding on just to say I made it for one year. And it's been amazing. You know--.

[Crosstalk]

WT: I need to read that book. 'Cause I've been nine to five--.

RBE: Oh, it's gonna be out of--.

WT: That is--.

RBE: This world.

WT: Been, like, it's been, um, killing me.

RBE: I--.

WT: Uh--. Oh my god--.

RBE: I don't see how--.

WT: This-thi-th-this ain't--..

RBE: People have a life--.

WT: This can't be life.

RBE: Yeah. That's-that's exactly--.

WT: And the thing is, it's not even, like, hard work. It's just, you know--.

[Crosstalk ends]

RBE: I don't see how people can have a night--. Yeah--.

WT: Yeah.

RBE: This job isn't hard at all.

WT: Right.

RB: I don't see how people can work a nine to five and have a life.

WT: Right.

MK: Yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RBE: My life has been on hold for the past ten months, and counting for two more months. And I'm just saying that, you know, it's-it's so important that as entrepreneurs, as artists, that we stay true to who we are and we're building our own dream. We're not building someone else's dream by working for them, but we're building our own dream. We're leaving a lasting legacy: Our art, our voice, our stories. And that is so important because, I'm telling you, it's so important that we talk to young people because it starts in the sandbox. It starts with the young people. You know, and you see the differences right there, and if we as artists and entrepreneurs don't address it, the gap gets bigger. You know, and any gap you want to talk about in the sandbox, you hear one child say: 'Um, when I grow up, I want to work at that building.' You hear the other child say, 'Yeah, my dad owns that building. When I grew up, I'm gonna own that building, too.' See, those two gaps right there, and you hear that in the sandbox. And if we don't talk to that child that says, 'I want to work there' and put in him the idea that he can own that building, he can be a-a V.I.P., he can be a C.E.O. there- you know, and not necessarily there, but his own thing, his own business. If they don't hear us say that, they don't even know that's possible, they don't even know they can dream that. And it's not until we talk to them and tell them 'You can own your own business; you can start in

fourth grade, you can start anywhere you--.' It--. You don't have to have a degree, you don't have to have money, that's where you're gonna start the business and you don't have the money. You can start wherever you are, and be whatever you want to be and do whatever you want to do. But if this--. If we don't voice it to them, they will grow up with-with the broad majority thing: ' I gotta grow up, get a job, go to college, get a job, work for someone else, work for minimum wage, hope I can work at McDonald's, hope I can work for--.' That's just so and so. You know, and it's up to us--.

WT: Yeah. You don't even realize--.

RBE: To tell there is another way--.

WT: All possibilities, like.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: That's right, they don't.

WT: There's so many different roads.

RBE: I know you hear that when you talk to 'em. I hear it all the time. They don't even think about the possibility of--.

WT: Right.

RBE: Owning that building. They just think about working at that building.

WT: Right.

RBE: We got to let them know there is another way, and it's totally up to you.

WT: Right.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

RBE: You choose it. So, I don't know, I get a little bit too passionate [Laughs].

MK: No, no, that's good.

WT: (inaudible - 00:49:32).

MK: Just--.

WT: Yeah.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: Yeah, I love it.

MK: I totally agree with that. Um, it's so, um--.

RBE: Yeah, they d--.

MK: Interesting.

RBE: If we don't talk about branding and marketing--. You know, as a coach, I was talking to them, you know, as a artist, you can be the world's best artist out there, but if you don't know how to brand yourself, if you don't know how to market what you do--.

WT: Right.

RBE: You'll be the best and the only one that knows about the being- that you're the best.

WT: Right.

RBE: You gotta learn how to branch stuff, how to market yourself.

WT: And I wonder how much of that is missing from arts education. You know, I feel--.

RBE: Oh.

WT: About--. I have a, uh--.

RBE: Big time.

WT: A Master of Fine Arts degree, and it's just now, over the last couple years, that I've started to take more ownership over the idea of-of-of mark- how much marketing is tied to--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: What I do, right, in terms--.

RBE: Right.

WT: I-I, like, think I made good work, um--. But how else do I start to share that work--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

WT: If not taking from, um, taking ownership over the way that that's, uh, disseminated to folks, right? Like-like-like, nobody else is gonna do it. And so I think when-when artists are being trained, I wonder how much they're being encouraged to think about how to get out what they do, and how they can, like, have some power over framing that versus just, like, waitin' on some--. The- the myth that you'll be, like, discovered, right? Somebody would, like--.

MK: Yeah.

WT: Somebody's just gon' come up on you in w- real- and realize like, 'Oh, you makin' great stuff. I'mma put you on,' and it-and it doesn't, eh, you know,w--. 99.9 percent of the time, that's not how it works, you know? And so, starting to understand that you have, um, some autonomy when it comes to, um, how your- the choices you

make out in the world, um, and the possibilities for you as a-as a professional that you can-you can have some say so to choose, like, work most of your life. Just being an entrepreneur is incredible. You know, you see that most people do have-do have set up in their mind, like, 'Who I'm--. How I'm gon' get this job?' You know, 'Ho--. Um, who do I know that could give me this job?', um, versus making their own opportunities. And I think that's-that's really valuable knowing that you can, like, have an idea and turn that into, you know, your livelihood - and I think it's-it's great.

RBE: And live debt free [Laughs]

WT: Right, right.

MK: Oh, that's so serious.

RBE: Oh, yes.

WT: Yeah.

MK: And it's--.

RBE: And that--. When you--. Do you know our young people don't even have the cognizant, um, idea that- 'You mean it's possible, I can live debt free?' They don't even think that way. They're not even talked--.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: To about living debt free until they're totally in debt.

WT: Right.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: And they wish--.

WT: (inaudible - 0:52:03)

RBE: 'Oh, my goodness. I wish--.'

WT: When it's too late, right?

RBE: 'Somebody told me this.'

WT: Yeah.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

RBE: So we need to be having these conversations with everyone. You can live debt free, you don't even have to get in debt. It's going to mean delayed gratification, you're going to have to wait until you save up money to get this car, or get this house, but you can do this. And if you are in debt, there's a way to get out and get from that point to being debt free. We gotta have these conversations with them.

MK: Yeah, understand their (inaudible - 00:52:30)

RBE: If we don't, they will not even think about it.

MK: Yeah. Me and that brother over there have financial conversations every day.

RBE: I love it.

MK: Every day. Um--.

RBE: Gee, I'd like to talk to you guys then.

MK: [Chuckles]

RBE: Because I-I don't get to have con--. I mean--.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: I have conversations like this with young people, but my peers? I don't get to have conversations like this--.

WT: I agree.

RBE: Let's just be honest. Y-you know that there's some people your age, your peers, that you can talk to about being debt free.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: And they gon' walk away and go, 'Who do they think they are?'

MK: [Chuckles] Yeah.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

RBE: Yeah, and they don't understand w-we're not trying to impress them or brag, we're trying to bring them up. So they don't have to worry about the next paycheck. That makes it--.

WT: Yeah, people do be forgettin' that, like, you gon'--. You, like, that you have to accumulate debt.

MK: And I'm-I'm gonna be honest, I'm not debt free now--.

WT: Right.

MK: But I got a couple of student loans I need to knock out but-but yeah, I mean, just the idea of, like, owning property--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: Right.

MK: Buying, like--.

RBE: Right.

MK: The importance of that, um--. Everyday we have those convos, and it--. You know, it's real. I never thought I would have been to this point. Well, I thought that stuff was interesting.

[Laughter]

MK: So interesting. I'm so old--.

RBE: Yes, yes, yes.

MK: Right now. I'm so--. Yeah, I'm so old right now. It used to be video games and sports.

WT: Right.

MK: Now it's, like, credit cards, and, like, securing- secure--. You know, just--.

WT: Right.

MK: Making sure that we got our stuff right.

WT: Right.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MK: Before we go into this next--. 'Cause we're entering that next stage of life and there's---. You know, I can't wait to, like, own some--. I don't even--. I mean, I'm still renting now, so. But in another two years, I plan on having--.

RBE: Well I'll invite you to my next [Laughs] financial workshop---.

MK: [Laughs] Okay.

RBE: Then. Maybe we can do one together.

[Chuckling]

WT: Mm.

RBE: What's our next question?

WT: Do y'all wanna go with this, uh--. I feel like, in a way, we've talked about this:  
um, *Does a sense of civic responsibility affect formal decisions made in your studio?*

(inaudible - 00:54:23) I feel like studio could be transposed for, um--.

RBE: Yeah.

WT: Work- writing workshop.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: Whatever your workspace might be. Um, *Civic responsibility effect formal decisions.*

RBE: Yeah, I think we've all experienced (inaudible - 00:54:39).

WT: Absolutely.

RBE: Yeah.

WT: Yeah, I mean I-I think it's- it'd be odd for me not to, I think--.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

WT: Because you--. There is no cut off, I think, from, um, your origins, right?  
Like-like, I--. How you've come up and whatever opportunities you end up coming into,  
it's like your life is holistic that way and that--. I think about, um, power and- how and the  
artwork that I'm making go into directly a-affect, um, either my loved ones or the people  
that I want to see it. And so I-I don't think I-I s- make a separation between what I'm  
making as an artist, like that d-does lead to design, um, from the impact that it might  
have socially. And I guess I--. Maybe I'm always wondering, 'Is it gonna have, like- like,

will it have the impact that I want it to?' You know, like, is-is making a painting, um, like, i-is making a painting gonna have the same effect as going out and, um, working on a soup kitchen or something, or going, like, volunteering, uh, to somebody in a different capacity. So you--. I've maybe a way, like, whether or not making- like, doing an art project is the same as doing something that is more clearly defined as like social service or community service. And I'm like, 'Okay. H-how do you like, bring those things together?' You- teaching is-is one. I feel like a teacher-ing mentorship is- feels like one real obvious way, or direct way, of doing that. Right? Um, so to do what we talked about in terms of the- offering possibilities to, uh, to young people.

[Pause]

RBE: I think to be an artist is to be civic (inaudible - 00:56:29).

WT: Mm.

RBE: I think that the very thought of, um, civic responsibility is what drives our art to make it something that the public is going to get something out of. You know?

WT: Mm-hmm.

RBE: 'Cause we can make art for ourselves all the time, but we always do it with a mind to what is, um, aesthetically pleasing to us, but also blind to how the public is gonna be seeing this: is this gonna cause them to, you know, think, stretch themselves, you know, whatever our medium is, so--.

WT: Yeah.

[Speaker intermittently agrees]

RBE: And I think it's always civic minded, and that's taking responsibility for, um, our civic duties.

WT: Absolutely. It seems like the next-the next real big in the debt--. Whatever I think is still-- like, we-we-we've touched on for sure, right?

RBE: Oh, I could talk--.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: About that all day.

MK: [Laughs]

RBE: So let's- let me just read it out loud. I love this: *How is cultural memory passed down to younger generations? Discuss legacy intergenerational advocacy and mentorship*. And we have definitely been talking about this online and I think-I think, as artists, that is what is so important about what we do.

WT: Absolutely.

RBE: And I think that-- I'm guessing that all of us have been called to give. I don't know how each of us came to this process, but, um, I got a email inviting me to be a part of this.

WT: Yeah.

RBE: And I thought, 'Yeah, I love it--.'

WT: [Laughs] Right.

MK: Yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RBE: Because I think that that's what we're all involved in: passing down to the younger generations a legacy, cultural memory. Um, my way of doing it is through storytelling. Um, someone else's way of doing it might be through paintings, visual art;

another person's, um, way might be through music, but that's what we're all involved in as teaching artists, especially. As teaching artists, as artists that we are, um, talking about and actually involved in leaving a legacy, um, intergenerational advocacy and mentorship. Um, if we don't mentor our young people and talk about these things and pass on the cultural memory, it'll be lost; and we don't want it to die out with us. Um, as a Native American, my tribe, our language is still spoken. But here in our--. And we used to be one of the second largest tribe in that--.

WT: What-what tribe did you-did you say you were from?

RBE: I'm from the Tuscarora tribe.

WT: Tuscarora. You said that, yeah.

RBE: And most people only know about the Tuscaroras from the war of 1710 through 13. The Tuscarora war that you study about in fourth grade. But, um, w- so we still have our language, but at our reservation, there's only a handful of people in North Carolina that still speak our language. More people in New York, the reservation, and we have them speak it, but I know tribes right now — well, there's still people that are alive from that tribe it's not totally extinct, but the language is totally extinct. There are no speakers of the language, and I will look at that and I think about this: cultural memory, legacy, advocacy — it will die out just like those languages if we don't keep it going. So it has to be on our mind all the time.

WT: (inaudible - 00:59:46) The, um--. I'm curious, have y'all- have you had, or do you still have, like, a mentor? That you just (inaudible - 00:59:55)?

RBE: Oh, I do. Yes.

WT: You do?

RBE: I do have a mentor. I mean, my mentor has--. Oh, boy. I don't know where I'd be without my mentor.

WT: I don't think I have a mentor right now.

RBE: Everyone needs to have a mentor.

MK: Yeah.

WT: I have, like, peers, I think that I look up to. I mean, like the conversation that we've had today, and I think of Antoine as someone that's done-done things that I, like, look up to and someone he's looked--I-I look to for advice. Um--.

RBE: But even a--.

WT: Yeah.

RBE: Book can be a mentor for you also.

WT: Mm-hmm.

RBE: You know, maybe you read a-a great book of wisdom that has really given you great ideas that you've acted upon. You can look at that book as having ment-- or the author then-- as having been a great mentor to you, even though you've never met him and never had a conversation. But, um, I've had books that have been mentors, I had a physical mentor, one in particular, that is just--. I mean, I-I can't even begin to think where I'd be if it hadn't been for a mentor. Everyone needs to have a mentor--.

MK: Yeah.

WT: That's awesome.

RBE: And you--. And it's easy to get 'em. It's just a matter of--. Like, when we talk about mentorship, the way, as adults, we would get a mentor is if you get someone in your field--.

WT: Mm-hmm.

RBE: Doing what you're doing, but has already done all the building block steps themselves, and they've arrived at a step-a state that you want to get to--.

WT: Right.

RBE: And you just say to the person, 'Wow. They were so good.' I mean, 'cause they are, that's why you admire them.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: But you say to 'em, you know, 'Y-you done so well, I admire you so much. Could you me a little bit of help and you--'.

WT: Right.

RBE: 'Give me some pointers on the steps I could take to arrive, um, you know, even approach where you are?' No person is gonna say no 'cause, number one, you're flattering them.

WT: Right.

RBE: You know? And they're gonna be glad to help you, and, you know--.

WT: You got somebody like that?

MK: Yeah, I got a few.

WT: Let's hear it.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MK: Yeah. Um, the biggest- the-the-the biggest one is my dad. Um, because he was-he wasn't really a graphic designer, but he-he did technical drawing when I was growing up. So I get a lot of my drawing skills from that, but--. Um, so even like, when I-I'm just lost, or I don't know what direction to go in, I just always go back and ask him. And even, like, from a spirituality side, like, there's people that I lean on. As far as our financial mentors, um, I keep a couple, [Laughs] so.

RBE: Yeah, we need to. And, um, when I said the point about books- I'm gonna show you this. [Shifting of paper] I have a library of--.

WT: Wow.

RBE: Over 35,000 books in my house.

WT: Oh, my goodness.

MK: Wow.

RBE: Books can really be a mentor.

WT: That's amazing.

[Crosstalk]

RBE: Yeah. I'm telling you--.

WT: Yeah, that's--.

RBE: Books--.

WT: That's intense.

RBE: Can really, um, be a mentor.

WT: That's incredible.

[Crosstalk ends]

RBE: I saw this room when I was in second grade.

WT: Mm-hmm.

MK: That's so amazing.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RBE: Okay? In second grade, I decided I was going to have a house with the least 10,000 books in. I have over 35,000 books in my house right now and counting, and adding. So, um--. You know, but most people I know don't like to read nowadays, and if they do, they want to read it on this thing. You know, but I-I still like the book. Yeah, mentors are so important. And I think that, um, just as important as mentors are to us, it is so important that we are mentors to young people, even though they don't even feel like they need a mentor, don't know what a mentor is, don't want a mentor, we have got to be a mentor to them. We really do.

MK: Super important.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

[Shifting of cards]

WT: An-any thinking or look-look interesting to you?

[Crosstalk]

MK: Um, ch--.

WT: With a couple--.

MK: Did she say we have--.

[Crosstalk ends]

WT: With a couple little minutes I think.

MK: Ten minutes left?

MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Yeah.

RBE: I put--.

MK: Okay.

RBE: A timer on, too. Um, [Pause] we have--.

[Shifting of cards]

WT: Wanna talk about crying Jordan?

[Laughter]

RBE: We have, approximately, five minutes left.

WT: Wow.

RBE: Mm-hmm.

WT: We can do a lot with five.

MK: *Being the only black person in the room.*

WT: Oh--.

RBE: Oh, wow.

WT: This one, yeah.

RBE: Ha.

WT: Man.

MK: You touched on that earlier.

RBE: Yes.

MK: Um--.

RBE: That's always been my life; being the only Black person, being the only red person there — Um, 'red' being Native American. Um, and a lot of times people will say: 'Doesn't that intimidate you?', I go, 'No. That gets me so fired up.'

WT: [Laughs]

MK: Yeah, yeah.

RBE: I mean, and you have to look at it that way.

WT: Right.

RBE: Because, you know, it makes me sad because there aren't more there, but thank God I'm there. I'mma make sure I speak up.

WT: Right.

MK: To represent.

RBE: They're gonna hear from this person right here.

WT: Right.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RBE: You know what I wanted to say [Laughs]

MK: [Chuckles]

RBE: I'm like, 'Yup. This little girl' [Laughs].

MK: [Chuckles]

RBE: That's so important. And-and the- it's sad and that why aren't there more there? Why are we the only one there? You know, what I mean? But thank God we're there, and I think that we need to say something about that. You know, when I- when I'm the only person, I always say to 'em, 'Where are all the other people of color here?'

W-how is it- how is it I got invited but no one else did? Tell me what made the difference.' Now, you know, they get real uneasy [Laughs] when you say that, but I really wanna know.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

WT: It's--. I feel like it can be-- depending on what it is-- it can be anxiety inducing. So I-I went to, um, my-my-my first year of grad school, I was the only Black student out of, um, maybe about, uh, eighteen students. And into my second year, when, um, my friend Antoine came, uh, then it was the three Black men in the program. But that first year, I think f-for me, it was, like, awkward. It just felt like, 'Yeah, why am--?' Me questioning whether or not I had been, like, brought on to the program because of some kind of, like, affirmative action, you know, right? Because of, um, a quota? Like, was my work quality, or did they just need, like, at least one Black person? And so, for me, it-it and turned out to be, like, kind of a psychological, um, sort of barrier for me. Sometimes in thinking, like, 'Okay, do I really belong here? Do I have, like, uh, (inaudible - 01:06: 04) have I accomplished the right amount of things to actually have earned my spot here?' And so I feel like it takes for us some time- or, like, to take ownership over what we have accomplished and-and- know our value to be able to fight against those kind of, like, um, potentially damaging kind of, um--.

RBE: Negative thoughts.

WT: Negative experiences like-like thoughts about whether or not we, like, deserve to be in the- in the, um, in the positions that we are. And so I think helping-- again, going back to young people-- helping young people understand what their value that they are valuable regardless of whether or not they get, like, certain accolades or

whatever. That they don't take for somebody, like, to award you something or to say that to invite you to a party, to invite you to, uh, a thing for you to know that you're-you're good. Right? That your, um- your contributions matter. And so I think that's somethin' is that-that-- like, it don't take white people to say that you're good at what you do for it to be good. Um, and as I think that's something that-that I think about today is that, er--. If I am the only Black person in the room, that I-I-I belong here. I-like-- like, what I've done is insufficient, you know, um, regardless of how it's going to be assessed, uh, by a outside group, or whatever. Um, but I think to-to fight against that, not being the only one in the room, like, when you notice an event where there's a, uh, gallery show, or a museum thing, or a show- whatever, you know what-what the demographic gonna look like being- bring somebody with you, right? Bring some- bring, uh, other Black folk with you that-that wouldn't otherwise, like, think about going to-to the event. I think there's something to that and-and mixin' up the crowd. Um, being intentional about, like, getting more of us, more people color in spaces where they aren't, like-like--. People bring folks that you know, um, might have a good time. They just never thought that they, like, belonged. Th-th-they didn't feel welcome.

RBE: Right.

MK: Show up and show out, right?

RBE: That's right.

WT: Right.

RBE: That's--.

MK: Yeah [Laughs].

RBE: It right there.

MK: You gotta show up; You gotta represent, like, um--.

RBE: That's right.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

MK: I used to hate--. I've been in a lot of situations where I was the only Black person, but now, um, I just go in there and represent who I am- you know, represent culturally. Represent for Charlotte. Like, even though, like, you know I'm from here, I've been to a lot of places. I'm always just representin', like, that positivity. Um, just letting people know, so. Show up and show out [Laughs].

WT: Right.

RBE: I agree. Yeah, I grew up in situations where I was always the only person of color there- always. Um, the school I went to for middle school- it wasn't even middle school, back then it was junior high- but I was, um--. Me and three of my best friends, we were the only children of color there.

MK: Wow.

RBE: That was rough. And, um- you know, and I still to this day, there are events that we go to- you know, that I go to, that I'm the only person of color there. And I-I know that, number one, I belong there, but there are so many others that belong there. And--.

MK: Mm-hmm.

RBE: It's so sad that they're still situations where people want to think that, um, 'Where we gotta get a token here.'

HH: Thank you guys so much today. If you could, like, wrap the conversations up or stay all night, I don't care [Claps]. (inaudible - 01:09:33)

WT: [Chuckles]

RBE: This has been good, though.

MK: I love it.

WT: Yeah, this is cool.

RBE: Yeah, I do too. I wish we had more of this.

WT: For sure. Y'all wonder, um, what the initiative that they, like, takin' around the country, I wonder: are people, like, doing their own, like, similar thing after they leave? Like, because I know they were in New Orleans, and they did Chicago--.

MK: Houston.

WT: Oh, they did Houston?

MK: Yeah.

WT: Like, I wonder, when they leave a place, does- do artists there, like, go--.  
Like, do y'all do stuff like this? (inaudible - 01:10:02)?

MK: It's the first time I've ever done anything like this--.

RBE: Really?

MK: So. And I've--.

WT: That's wild.

MK: Been to, um, I've been to every one of the Black Lunch Ta- except--.

WT: Okay.

MK: For one, which I-I was out of town for the show.

WT: Okay.

RBE: This is my first time being--.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: A part of this.

MK: The other one's weren't audio. We were just, like, um, creating Wikipedia pages.

MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Oh, okay.

MK: Yeah. And then we did one--.

RBE: The same group (inaudible - 01:10:23).

MK: Or, which is Heather and-and Hasan, the guy with the blue hat on.

WT: Okay.

MK: Um, one time we just did it for fun, just on a Sunday.

WT: That's what's always--.

RBE: (inaudible - 01:10:31)

MK: Yeah. So--.

RBE: But I think that, um, I think this is so necessary (inaudible - 01:10:38).

MK: Yeah, it's--.

RBE: Vicky Graham.

MK: Super necessary.

RBE: It used to be Vicky Graham was over the, um- oh, what was the name? Round table. It was called "The Round Table Artists" and it was a part of the Afro-American Culture--.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: Center. And I remember--.

MK: Yeah.

RBE: When she invited me, I said: 'Are you sure? Do you have to be Black to be a part of it?'

MK: Yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RBE: It seems. And she was the first person who reached out to me from the AfroAm Center, she said: 'No, come on. And me and (inaudible - 01:11:07) and Candace Jennings were the first graduating class from the round table, and this was like 15 years ago. She since died, but, um, Vikki has. But that was such a great thing: artists got together once a month, every month, and we had dialogue like this; we had play days; we had meetings on, um, branding, marketing, um, you know, just mentorship — all kinds of things. And it--. All of us grew so much. And then I later went back-- and it was all volunteer-- later went back and-and did workshops on marketing and branding and--. You know, so I-I would like to see all of us tryna start a group thing here. Yeah--.

[Crosstalk]

WT: I can see y'all, like, building on this--.

RBE: See, I'm just here to say this is awesome. Yeah.

WT: Like, being in the city I just feel like--.

RBE: Hi, yes you can.

MK: Yeah.

RW: I'm just gonna listen--.

RBE: Can I ask you what you have on?

RW: So, I'm from that (inaudible - 01:12:10) even when I'm (inaudible - 01:12:12) from white.

MK: You guys are welcome.

HH: Yup. Huh?

MK: Go get Carl the big (inaudible - 01:12:16)

RBE: Uh-huh.

RW: (inaudible - 01:12:17)

RBE: Oh, okay, okay. I didn't even know if it was the breathing machine, or if it was the [Laughs] water machine, or what.

[Laughter]

RW: I'm just regularly (inaudible - 01:12:30)

WT: (inaudible - 01:12:31)

RW: Um, but--.

RBE: Neat. I like that.

RW: Did y'all have a great conversation?

RBE: Oh, yes--.

WT: It was really good.

RBE: It was fantastic. What about your table? I know some. (inaudible - 01:12:40).

RW: Yeah, I saw that.

WT: (inaudible - 01:12:41) Everybody--.

RBE: So we didn't know each other.

WT: You, Antoine.

RW: Um, James and--.

RBE: So how do we continue this and do this? That's what I want to know. How do we continue this?

WT: Right.

RBE: But I also want to get a plate of food to go before I leave [Laughs].

WT: Right. This is gonna be the same.

RBE: [Laughs] Yeah.

WT: (inaudible - 01:12:59)

RW: (inaudible - 01:13:00)

RBE: Oh my goodness this was good. I was wonderin' who it was. And when I tasted the cornbread, I said, 'This ain't no Boston Market. This somebody knows how to cook.'

[Laughter]

RBE: I'm sayin' exactly what I said- I said when I taste that cornbread, I was (inaudible - 01:13:12) this ain't Boston Market--.

[Laughter]

RBE: Somebody knows how to cook. [Laughs] Now you can't even say- how are you supposed to say cornbread. I said this is not a boston market--.

RW: (inaudible - 01:13:22).

[Inaudible due to multiple speakers from 01:13:25 - 01:13:56]

RW: I'm, like, 'Don't turn it off--.] [Mic movement] Um, put some respect on it.

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HH: That was Ryan Williams.

RYAN WILLIAMS: [Laughs]

[Audio cuts off]

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by Andres Molina 1/30/2021

To be copyedited.