

File Name: IGX_092917_PPL1
Event Date: September 9th, 2017
Location: Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA
Participants:
RACHEL RANEY
BRENDAN GREAVES
DEBORAH STROMAN
KEIA MASTRIANNI
OREN LEBLANG
Length: 00:51:19

Preface

The following conversation was hosted at the National Humanities Center, facilitated by jina valentine. 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

DS: Alright, it's going.

KM: Great.

OL: So you published this?

KM: Yes. Well, a friend of mine publishes, he's part--.

OL: Cleaver you.

KM: I'm a part of that editorial team.

OL: (inaudible - 00:00:12)

KM: Mm-hmm.

[Crosstalk]

OL: That's right, that's what I meant.

KM: (inaudible - 00:00:14) says that, magazine.

[Crosstalk ends]

DS: Oh, I like the color wheel.

[Pause]

RR: This thing is so delicious.

KM: I know. It is wonderful.

OL: Do you wa- are you--? Go ahead. I agree with that. I eat at this store frequently, so it's--. Mm-hmm.

RR: I used to until the lines were really long.

OL: The lines are bad. I gotta go early now, I know. Mm-hmm.

[Announcer provides instructions - 00:00:32 to 00:01:35]

JINA VALENTINE: Hey, everybody. Real quick announcement here; it looks like everybody's kind of found their (inaudible - 00:00:36). Um, so Kenny and (inaudible - 00:00:39) are gonna be coming around and turning on the recorders at each table. Um, if you could, before you begin talking with each other, just, um, announce—. Just say, for the record, your full name. Um, and there's also a deck of cards on each table. Um, the deck of cards are conversation prompts, you can deal them out as you would at a poker game--.

[Laughter]

JV: You could pass them around, you can then trust one person at your table with them. Um, [Laughs] personally, I recommend just passing them around. Um, you don't have to stick to the conversation prompts, but they just give you a place to begin conversations about issues related to life here in North Carolina. Um, but yeah. So, again, the most important thing to remember is that, before you guys get into discussion, just say your full name. Um, it'll just help our transcribers to identify your voice while they're going through the audio. Thanks. Bon appetit.

[End of instructions]

MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Thank you.

BG: Who would like to begin?

RR: So, she said we all go around and say our names?

MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Yeah.

RACHEL RANEY: Okay. This is Rachel Raney [Chuckles]

BRENDAN GREAVES: Uh, I'm Brendan Greaves.

DEBORAH STROMAN: Debby Stroman.

KEIA MASTRIANNI: My name is Keia Mastrianni.

OREN LEBLANG: And Oren Leblang.

KM: 'Kay.

BG: Alright. So, should we get to these cards?

KM: I guess so.

BG: I think they're gonna be some challenging questions and [Laughs] topics in here.

KM: I guess that's the point.

DS: Shuffle them or--?

BG: Yeah, I'll shuffle them if that's (inaudible - 00:02:04)

OL: (inaudible - 00:02:03)

DS: Yeah, absolutely.

BG: Does-does that sound good?

RR: Sure.

[Laughter]

OL: Don't- don't deal off the bottom.

BG: [Laughs]

DS: I was at the first, um, Black Lunch Table.

BG: Oh, you were?

DS: Mm-hmm.

BG: Oh, great.

DS: In 2014.

BG: So you're familiar with this?

DS: Well, it's just conversation.

BG: Yeah.

KM: Mm-hmm.

[Crosstalk]

OL: So, is it freewheeling?

DS: Everybody grabs and whatever we--. Or in a mood--.

OL: We're just freewheeling? It's just lunch conversation?

DS: That's right.

OL: Alright, good.

BG: Um--.

OL: Can we talk--.

KM: Can you queue?

BG: Jina's an old friend of mine. We knew each other fairly long here. Many years ago, we worked with the same art gallery, Um--.

OL: You're from Philly?

BG: Yeah, I lived there for years before moving here. I moved here in 2006. But, I'm embarrassed to say this is my first Black Lunch Table conversation, so, um, I'm really happy we're here. I guess I could keep passing them out, but maybe we'll just start with one for now [Laughs].

DS: Anybody like your card, and if you wanna start that conversation, well...

OL: Oh, this is cold.

KM: Ha.

BG: Oh, no.

KM: [Laughs]

OL: This is cold. This is, like, the void.

DS: Whatever's on your mind.

OL: Whatever's on my mind.

BG: [Chuckles] The void. I'll give you another one if you want, but-but maybe that's intentional.

OL: [Laughs] Really?

KM: Maybe so.

OL: Card's so white, I noticed.

[Laughter]

OL: Which is, like, the white man's card.

BG: [Laughs]

RR: Well--.

OL: We were--.

KM: Go ahead.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

OL: We were talking about--. Well, I--. We weren't, but the subject of home came up and it was resonating 'cause-'cause--. Eh, I guess I never felt --really until late in adulthood-- that, like most people, I didn't have a home. There wasn't a place I felt was home. Um, a-and that's my generation. My parents were both born in a town --in Pottstown, Pennsylvania-- with ten and eleven siblings, respectively. And that was community and family. So of course, what we went through was a dissolution of all of that, and anytime I've been in a place where I was invited to come and be in some community, with a sense of bond was there, it felt wonderful 'cause when I was small they left to move to Florida and it was-. You know, just a classic dissolution of family and a loss of home. They were never happy again, and we were kind of fragmented. And it

wasn't until we moved here, my spouse and I — similar stories — and--. Eh, or-or--. We have horses, our sport. Not a big deal, but we ride. And we bought a little horse farm. It was still in the country in (inaudible - 00:04:45) County and fell in love with this piece of land; a dumpy house, but a very, very lovely piece of land. And-and that became home. And so, people were talking about home being this and that, and I guess the sense of, you know, where your f- kin are bo- buried or born. But for us, it was clearly about finding land that we loved, love of land. And-and that's nothing original, but I wonder if anybody else had a similar experience of being from a place where they really were rigid and bland. You know, whether it--. 'Cause, like me, most of my life was rootless.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

DS: Well, if I tie it back to race, which this is about [Chuckles], as you all know, the history of African Americans being enslaved, kidnapped from Africa. So, um, if I just go with my particular roots, there is no land. Um, we have one piece of property that was my grandfather's, and right now--. No, great grandfather. So, we're not sure how he received this land — outside of Richmond, but it's a- I think, maybe, like two or three acres? And right now, the great grands, we're all trying to figure out 'Do we keep it? Somebody's been paying taxes on it.' You know? Development is all about--.

RR: Is it farmland?

DS: No, just a piece of- small little property. Um, but generally, the history of the country, we weren't allowed to buy land or maybe now, unless a slave master said he--. you know, 'Here's for your faithful service.' You know, 'Here's a plot.' Um--.

KM: Um--.

DS: Perspective on land.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

KM: I loved why you--. I loved that you shared that, 'cause I --. As soon as he was talking about home and land and I- I immediately- when I was thinking, in terms of race, about Black land loss, you know, and there's these, um, inherited pieces of property which, um, African Americans in-in particular have lost over the years. You know, whether it's being taken advantage of, usurped by somebody who has money to purchase land and-and there's, you know, no clear --. Because of-of-of enslaved Africans, there's no clear documentation that this was given to them at cert- a certain point. And so, um, that's a huge problem. And even for me, personally, er, um, I-I--. My partner is a farmer and we, you know, we work off his family's land, but, um, land is such a valuable resource and to have a place where you can set up and build your community, or build your home and, um--. Eh, you know that-that's just- it's a- it's a value, you know? We don't have a lot, so to have our own piece of land is so important and that was important back in history, too. Um, something to claim as your, right? Um--.

DS: It's very American.

KM: Right. And I was think--. Uh, I published this publication called "Crop Stories," and a woman named Rosalind Bentley, who is a-an African American journalist, um, wrote this piece called "Acre by Acre We Must Hold On," and it is, um, specifically about a piece of land that her family owned. And, you know, everybody had a- has a say in what goes on with that land and somebody always--. Every year, it switches over to a different family member who, kind of, manages the maintenance of that, but, um, they had fallen into some issues and they really had to find legal resources to help them hold onto their land. And, um, I was trying to look up the specific

organization, but there is, um, an organization I think, maybe, that started at Texas A&M doing really good work helping African Americans, who have these, kind of, heirs property issues, hold on to their land.

DS: Well, I'd like to know. Thank you.

KM: So, I was gonna give you that information, yeah.

BG: I see that.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

DS: I'm reminded of, uh--. There's a book, something about white beaches or something, but the way a number of white Americans have stolen beach land from Blacks and the biggest example is Hilton Head. So, when you drive in, you see a lot of impoverished, lower- where Brown and Black people live and then you go into these glorious, you know, resorts and everything, but that was all- that was Black land. And the developers, or however it happened, but I'm sure it wasn't the most harmonious transaction [Chuckles]. And now they took that land from them.

BG: It's interesting. I, uh, was speaking with older African American folks. Particularly, I heard a lot of stories about, uh, Black beaches on the North Carolina and South Carolina coast. Folks that you--. You know, places people go to vacation. Uh, and obviously this arose during segregation and--. Like, what I noticed--. We were just talking about river folks about it a little. (inaudible - 00:09:41) have an interesting mix of resentment and nostalgia for those spaces. You know? There were things special about them because you shared them with your family. Um, and a lot of them now are unaffordable for anyone without money to go (inaudible - 00:09:56).

KM: The, um, Federation of Southern Cooperatives and (inaudible - 00:10:00)
Property Retention Coalition.

BG: Um, but I was talking to my friend, Jefferson, also who's a member of the
Lumbee drive here in North Carolina. There were also American Indian beaches.

RR: Oh, really?

BG: There's one beach in particular, I think, near- not too far from where Burrow
Beach was. Mm, I can't remember if it was in South Carolina or North Carolina, but
right at the border. That was where Native American folks went to go to the beach. So, I
just think when we have that-that legacy as well. (inaudible - 00:10:23) this spot
(inaudible - 00:10:26). Um, I don't know, it-it-it's different--. I mean, I-I grew up in-in
Massachusetts and, uh, my experience with race growing up there was so different
from what is here. And, um, you know, I think folks in the North have a very, uh, superior
attitude about race issues and--. In fact, like, those spaces--.

KM: Superior how?

DS: Yeah, define.

BG: I-I-I think- and the- I think folks in the North, at least, white folks, think that
race is not a point--.

OL: They have short memories.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

BG: Yeah, exactly. Short memories and they consider racism less of an issue;
and the North, they think it's a Southern thing. It's absolutely ridiculous. It's everywhere,
it's systemic. And in the North, I-I-I feel like the--. As far as space and place, I-I felt the
North was more (inaudible - 00:11:13) segregated in some ways than-than places in

North Carolina that I visited. Um, and it's more ingrained and accepted and less discussed and--. Which is curious. It-it was, sort of, a revelation for me to come here to, you know, to, uh--. I-I grew up thinking it was the s- you know, segregated racist South, and-and to think that, 'Well, it's absolutely the legacy, but people- s-some of the people are talking about it here?' Um, in the North it's very taboo and it's, you know, (inaudible - 00:11:45) Massachusetts in a rural area. You, (inaudible - 00:11:48) talking about it. I even thought about it as a real problem among the white community — um, and obviously in communities of color. [Laughs] Very different story, but, uh, but that was an interesting thing--. I mean, how space is different in segregated (inaudible - 00:12:01) American North versus the South.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RR: I had that experience [Clears throat] 'cause I grew up in rural West Tennessee and then eventually went to high school in Memphis. And-and then I picked up and went to university at, uh, University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. And so, I, you know when I got there--. First of all, I had this idea that everybody thought- had this certain idea of me being from the South, having an accent. Um, and then of course, like you said, they think, 'Oh, the North is so, you know, so tolerant, so, you know, um, doesn't have race issues etc., etc.' I mean, and Ann Arbor is right outside of Detroit, Michigan. And I would and visit some of my white friends' parents, you know, they take me home for the weekend and we would go to these white, white suburbs, you know, of Detroit and, you know, and it was like, 'Here's the Jewish suburb' --I-I'm Jewish American-- 'Here's the Jewish suburb, here's the Catholic kind of suburb, here's the WASP-y one', and there were, like, no Black people anywhere, and so I was just like,

'Well, at least I grew up around a lot of Black people.' Like, all the time, whether it was a small town or even in Memphis, my schools were totally integrated, um--. And so, yeah, you heard a lot of people growing up saying the n-word, you could see the confederate flag and things like that, um, but I knew and lived around a lot of people of color. And so, it's just this idea of like, 'Everything's okay, because we're all in our own corners'.

And-and this is a huge generalization, but that was my experience going North, to the progressive North from, you know, the racist South and-and--. I actually wrote about it in, uh, one of my first college essays. It kinda of--. That--. It struck me even as just a naive eighteen year old, you know. That clearly--. Not that everything was perfect, but that it was just kind of all not discussed. I think that was the thing that was--. I don't know.

KM: Yeah. I-I think about stuff like that where, you know, if you're a white person, you're- you're privilege just allows you to not have to educate yourself, not learn about these truths and histories and, you know, I see, um, you know, a lot of African Americans go through extreme pains to be well educated and to-to-to put themselves forth in that manner because it's- it's a- it's a w- it's how they can arm themselves in the world, is to be as educated as possible to go about the world in that way. And-and white people just be--. You don't have to educate yourself, you know? So, we-we-we encounter that ignorance 'cause it's like, 'Well, I don't have to because I don't need to learn about this 'cause why would you?' 'Cause you can go about the world without any troubles. You coul- you don't need obstacles, you know?

DS: It's the dominant culture.

KM: Right. Right. I just--. I don't know, for some reason I thought that, but education is such a powerful component in everybody's life; you know, to be educated to learn histories of others, to learn, you know, how America was built or things like that. Um, you know, there's white people in the world who don't know anything about that because they don't have to. You know?

[KM intermittently agrees]

DS: Or they believe the narrative that's out there, which, truly, is not working. And so, we have to go beyond formal education to get that education. I mean, we could just take Texas or other states where they're just trying to ban, you know, some books that we would consider harmless, but you could imagine bringing in education that was actually true to the history of racism in America and the oppression and all of that. I don't know, it's really sad.

RR: Does anybody have another card that they wanna..?

BG: Sure. Well, I-I got one that says, *Discuss your personal experiences with micro-aggressions* and that's a tough one. I mean, I'm s--. You know, I--. Um... what micro--.

OL: What-what's a micro-aggression?

BG: Well, that's it- eh, it's--. That's a good question. I mean, I-I think the idea is that it is, uh, ways in which people are, um, excluded--.

KM: Subtly discerning--. Yeah.

BG: Or insidiously discriminated against in daily life, not, you know, not, uh--.

DS: The stereotype.

BG: Not physical violence, but, you know, being, uh, overlooked when waiting in line at the bank or something like that because they may look different, uh, than what the-the teller is used to, or come from white--. You know, tiny-tiny actions that kind of build up over time in (inaudible - 00:16:45)

DS: In the context of race. So for example — right.

OL: I a--. No, I- to me, it's just aggression. You know, if people--.

DS: But in the context of race, that's how this word is used.

OL: Oh, yeah. Okay.

[OL intermittently agrees]

DS: So for example, um, there are some white people who are curious about Black hair. And so, if I had my hair like, uh, Jina's, coming over and say, 'Oh, can I touch your hair?'. That would be a micro-aggression. Um, or thinking that I can dance; you have no idea whether or not I can dance. So, those are the little microaggressions.

BG: Right, right. So, I mean--.

DS: Some people don't like this word anymore 'cause they say, um, 'It's all about the macro-aggression.' Go ahead.

BG: Well, it's all- it's both, I guess. I mean, to me, it's not something I experience as a- on the receiving end because I'm a white man. I mean, and s-so, I guess I could be--. It's interesting to reflect on how I have perpetrated micro-aggressions on other people, which I'm sure that I have at some point in my life. Um, I can't think of examples specifically, but I'm certain that I have. I think most people [Laughs] probably do in some way. Um--.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RR: Well, Melinda brought a great one up yesterday in the panel, um, the story about being in the store in Cambridge and the woman coming up to her and saying, 'What are you?' 'Cause she kind of--. I think this woman thought she looked kind of, like, hard to read, like, 'You are a little bit dark, you've got kinky hair,' you know, like, she couldn't place her in a category. Um--.

DS: I'll give an example: so --this is what someone told me-- so it was Brown and Black women, who had gone out to dinner after work and a white male joined them. And he was a little late, and they had the menus, everybody was looking at their food and thinking about what to order. And the white male just comes in, team member, and just says, 'Everybody put down your menus. I'll order everything, I'll show you what you need to order.'

OL: Oh, really?

DS: So, this was kind of a micro-aggression against women, and then women of color that--. You know, 'I really wanted this and you're giving me some white dominant--.'

KM: Mansplaining it up. [Laughs]

DS: Man--. Exactly.

BG: Yeah, you'd think male (inaudible - 00:18:53)

DS: So, that was--. Yeah.

OL: So-so--.

DS: That a man's gotta handle it, you know — and a white male at that.

OL: So did you let that go down or--?

DS: I wasn't there. This was something that was shared to me.

OL: Oh, you weren't there, oh. Th-that's bizarre.

DS: I think there was some positional power going on, so they didn't say anything to him, but they were all like, 'Can you believe he just did that?'

KM: Yeah.

DS: Yeah [Chuckles]

BG: I think that's common, too.

[Laughter]

OL: Yeah.

DS: Exactly.

OL: Ah, no. Not quite, yeah.

BG: Usually in smaller groups. [Laughs] Don't say that's common word, somebody assumes that --usually he-- (inaudible - 00:19:21). She wants- or should order 'cause, you know, he is the expert. He assumes the expertise.

DS: Right, the white male thing that--. Right.

BG: Um, so, I think that's pervasive.

MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Mm-hmm.

KM: Oh, yeah.

[Laughter]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RR: I-I've, uh--. Yeah. I notice in-in our- in my work place, um, and it took me--. I mean, I mean been there almost two years. But it--. Pretty much across the board, if you go to any meeting of more than three or four people around the table, the women all show up with a laptop, they're taking notes, um, and the-the men, and this is- in this particular workplace, they come in — most of the time they don't even have a notebook. They're just there, they're sitting- they're- there's tha- all this (inaudible - 00:20:06) body language: sitting back, fidgeting this thing, women are taking notes, writing things down. Usually, sending the summary of what happened, so, you know, I don't know if I'd call it a micro-aggression or just entrenched gender culture of who-does-what — and we're all peers. It isn't like some of us--. As a matter of fact, often times, some of the women who are coming and doing that, or even above, you know, hierarchically in the organization than everybody else, and so, um--. Yeah.

DS: Power.

RR: Not to- not to divert too much on the gender, uh--.

[Crosstalk]

OL: Well, but the gender is--.

KM: No, but that's the (inaudible - 00:20:45)

RR: Tract, but--.

[Crosstalk ends]

OL: The gender is quite resonant. You know? Yeah, yeah.

RR: Yeah.

OL: Women [Pause] confront aggression, white, Black, whatever.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RR: You know, I guess I see that as a way in which I would be able to, maybe, understand, um, Black folks' experience in ways that, as a white American, I might not. But if I look at it through a gender lens, and then I can see some of those parallels. You know, um, you know, sometimes feeling unsafe, uh, in certain groups, um, or feeling not welcomed somewhere, or, you know, um--.

KM: I think any experience where one is- feels like 'other,' or you feel separate from, um, is a, you know, a good- a good way to parallel that experience with the Black experience, but, still, I feel like there's ve--. A lot of differences in it, too. Um, you know, I came from a very working class, um, family; my dad worked in airline freight, um, we lived in D.C. and, uh, you know, I was the first kid out of the two before me to go to college. My pa- my parents never went to college and then, uh, you know, I was- joined a sorority, but it was my first experience with, kind of, this wealthy white bubble that I-I was never exposed to, I didn't understand it and I had a terrible experience. You know, I had to leave when I had, um, a big prejudice against Southern, wealthy white people for a very long time because it was just- it is a world that I don't know nothing of and it was- I--. There was such a divide and such a disconnect from the real world, in my opinion, that, um, it left a bad taste in my mouth for a long period of time. And I never- I didn't stay in that sorority. They were known as 'the bows and pearls sorority,' they were debutantes and things like that and that is not where I came from. You know? And on issues of-of race and things like that, for a long time, I think, I was probably remained in an ignorant place because I grew up--. Well, there was plenty of people of color in the-the communities that my father hung out with; so, you know, Pakistani people,

African Americans, Latinos, and we all lived in the neighborhoods together. So, I didn't see that for a long time, I didn't know that there was a difference for a very long time. You know? And then coming, you know, s---. So, I-I-I-I never saw things as an issue, so for a long time I didn't pursue learning about 'Well, what are the issues?' and 'What-what-what is the struggle here?' because I--. For a long time, I just--. It's- it's my life. It's- it's who you hang out with and it was no- there was no difference at the time, but then as you get older, you know, you start to see the-the breaking off. Even in early ages of, like, the Black lunch table, the-the white lunch table, the ner--. You know, everybody kind of separates and then you start to see these divisions coming up, and, um--. So yeah, that's- that's just some of my experience there. I'm really interested in this question: *Imagine racial equity*. You know, what does that look like?

[Laughter]

DS: Wow. A lot less stressful on people of color, I know that. Um--.

OL: [Laughs]

DS: Daily, it just--. Everyday, you see it. Racial lens. And to be free of that? Oh, I would sleep so much better, I wouldn't have to sue. You know, when you go into the store and you're followed and people are looking at you like, 'Okay.' Or they're really just doing their job, or they have- they have already put me in a- to a box. You know?

OL: You experienced that? You experienced that?

DS: Absolutely; every Black person in here. Everyday. We live this. I haven't been in one setting where this comes up, that- I mean all the Black (inaudible - 00:24:46) yes. You just it's- it's a lot. Yeah.

OL: I didn't mean discrimination, I meant (inaudible - 00:24:52), you know, followed in a store, you know, (inaudible - 00:24:55).

DS: Yes. Yes. So, there are times I'm dressed up very business, very professional. You know--.

OL: Doesn't mean shit, huh?

DS: And then I dress down. I'm an athlete, so I like dressing in t-shirts and shorts, but people don't know that that person is a professor at Carolina, so it's- it's--. Oh, yeah. It's very heavy.

MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Yeah.

DS: Mm-hmm.

RR: It was the case, it was, um, in the last year or so of the- I think it was a professional athlete that got tackled outside of a expensive hotel. Yeah, I think that was--.

DS: Well, how 'bout Oprah? Remember? She wasn't allowed to shop, she could buy the whole street.

RR: Right [Laughs]

DS: They didn't know she was Oprah Winfrey? She is- so she's a Black person.

RR: Yeah, yeah. Um--.

KM: Mm-hmm.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RR: I've been reading a little bit and he- and hearing, of course, a lot about the, um, the mental stress of poverty and how, um, how poverty can actually contribute to

make- people making poor decisions because, um, you know, um, when you're so worried about the car or the rent, or the doctor bill, or the grocery bill, or so many different things, um, and-and it's- it's- it's really- it's really painful to think about, that, um, for people living paycheck to paycheck or- and-and-and how many of color are doing that, um, and the stress and the toll that it-it-it almost makes it hard to even think about how to- how to get out of that. Um, so I-I did hear- read an article recently, um, or story about, um, this woman who was doing research into check cashing places. And the assumption is that you're really stupid if you use a cash- a check cashing place. You know, like, 'Who would do that?', 'You must be desperate,' or 'You're not--.' And-and actually, she uncovered all of these really legitimate advantages and reasons that-that poor people, or people of color, use check cashing places, um, that have to with people actually s--. Being under that stress, but also being really great problem solvers. And I thought that was so cool because that's the kind of thing that, um, you wouldn't really think about; about the ingenuity, or the-the problem solving skills, or that kind of thing that comes about with having to survive those kinds of circumstances. Right? So, it's kind of balancing out that stress with, actually, what-what people can do. Even if, um-um--.

KM: Right.

DS: I do, um, anti-racism, uh, education. And one of the things we talk about--. In fact, we have some graduate students doing some research on this in particular, but if we had this world where everybody was empowered--. Um, oftentimes when we think about racism and oppression, we think about the victims, as in the Brown and Black people. But we don't think about the advantages that whites have, but that advantage is

only due to your position in terms of Brown and Black people. So, when you think, 'Oh, well white people are doing so much better,' or 'White men are doing so much better,' well, because Brown and Black people aren't doing so well. But what we're looking at now is looking at white people and how racism really hurts you in comparison to white Europeans, because when you look on the big spectrum, white Americans, because of the weight of racism and its tentacles, you all aren't doing well. Case point, that opiate-opioid thing now? Uh, the obesity, uh, the lack of education when you think about--. You know, if someone knows what's the state capital of Nebraska--. You know, so all of these different things that's current in white Americans, but we don't really look at that because in comparison to the Brown and Black. But we're looking at research that is if we didn't have racism, white people would be doing so much better in America as well in all the different institutions.

[DS intermittently agrees]

RR: I love that argument. It's like trying to get people to turn away from the death penalty just by telling them, 'It's just really expensive.' And it just doesn't work, you know what I mean? Like, don't even have to get into whether it's morally right or wrong, or 'Should we take another life,' it's just like, you know, don't--. Yeah, it's just too costly. So, if it's like 'Racism is expensive.' [Laughs]

DS: Mm-hmm. It's like, 'Oh, well let's get a r- get of rid or ra-racism so Brown and Black people feel better now.' Well, that's true, but think about from Europe, you would feel better, too. [Laughs]

RR: Well, they that happiest cultures in the world, or happiest societies in the world, are where they're most equal. Right? More equality--. And that's just class, race,

and every which way, means more happiness across the board. So, when you live in a real unequal society--.

KM: So, it just--.

RR: All- everyone's unhappy.

DS: Just-just think how that white clerk must feel if their boss is saying, 'Look. Just follow that young Black man,' and that white clerk must feel, 'Well, my best buddy in high school is a Black guy and I don't want to follow him.' 'Well, you need to 'cause he might steal something.' So, that weight on that- on the white person is (inaudible - 00:30:04), but we don't look at that enough.

KM: Right, right. Yeah. Did you have a question?

OL: Oh, I just [Pause] couldn't imagine racial equality, unless, you know, we continue to [Pause] get more multi-racial people. You know? More bi and tri and quadruple racial people. You know? And I guess that our trend is that way, but, you know, there's a lot going on now with white identity politics that's repulsive, but there it is. Why we're in the situation that we're in, even in North Carolina, with the republican supermajority. It's white identity digging in and holding on. You know, I used to think 'Well, they'll die off,' but it's young people, too. And it's--.

DS: That's scary.

BG: Yeah. That's just alarming, I think, is that it's--. You know, it's a tendency I-I've had the tendency to (inaudible - 00:31:07) think it's a general related issue. Right? Well, my-my peers don't feel that way. It's- it's not struggling, you know? And it's more deeply entrenched than-than we think, or than I think, and it's alarming that, you know, this- these issues of race and racism and violence, specifically, and (inaudible -

00:31:28). The verbal or I said physical violence, that, I don't know if they're getting worse, but they're more visible. I guess the visibility is helpful in some perverse right because more and more people can respond in outrage and try to change things, but it's--. I feel very, um, very pessimistic of those things.

KM: Yeah. As a--.

BG: So, it's hard for me to imagine that, too. It just doesn't sit- it doesn't seem real. How-how does that happen except- unless we change our bodies. It--. I mean, is that- is that the only way? I don't know.

OL: I-I don't know. I mean, it does say equity, which, you know, we could fight for, you know, more, um, economic equity and we need that desperately, but...

KM: I was- I was talking with a-a food friend and-and ally and she's a--. We were just saying, like, systemic racism might- institutionalized racism--. It's like you have a biscuit and you can take- you can pull the raisins out of a biscuit, right? And-and that won't be there anymore, but you can't take, like, the baking powder out of the biscuit. You know it is so firmly cooked into that item, you cannot- that-that is so difficult to remove that. You know? And that's how we, er--. That is our [Laughs] food way of looking at things, as like it is so baked into our society, you know? And then--. So, when I think about racial equity, which we can, you know, think of, you know, like the kingdom of Heaven in which that might be where racial equity is. You know? And that's something that I think a lot of oppressed marginalized communities--. We hol- you know, hold on to that place. Um, but then I think about, 'Well, how could we do that in our lives?' Like, how can you do that in your corner of the world? How can I create some racial equity in my corner? How do you do that- eh, you know, how do we just start to

contribute? You know and--. I was talking with a friend, it was like 'This-this book right here--.' I mean, it's a very small contribution to a world, but we're very intentionable about bringing people of color in to tell stories and to, you know, to make sure that that was a balanced thing, that it wasn't all white writers or, you know, it--. We-we had to balance it, but how do we start to-to create that in our own space? 'Cause, for me, I get very overwhelmed when I think of this and then I just think of, you know, we're in the machine, like, I can't take the baking powder out of the biscuit, I don't know how to do that, I-I just--. And then I get overwhelmed, but I feel like being overwhelmed can bring me to inaction. But how do I do this in my space, you know? Um--.

DS: But one thing we know is that racism was constructed, so that means that it can be deconstructed. So, that's what we--.

OL: Don't- don't think it's everywhere in the world in every culture.

DS: It is, but the-the-the unique- the way it was baked in in America, it's definitely (inaudible - 00:34:26)

OL: Oh, here? Absolutely. Absolutely.

DS: Well, again, t-to your point, I h- I have, uh, my faith, so that's why I can continue to get up everyday and have these conversations, but I just believe that if we start individually--. And one thing that we hear a lot about is white allies and we need to stop that myth because white people, in particular white men, constructed racism. So white people need to deconstruct it, and so we are your allies. As opposed to being a white ally (inaudible - 00:34:59) Blacks and Brown people figure it out. No. We are your allies, so you have to talk to your white brethren, then kind of--. You know, when something ugly is said or discrimination occurs--.

KM: Yeah. So, it's--.

DS: That's what it's gonna take.

OL: Absolutely.

KM: Yeah, that-that term, you know, or phrase 'Go get your people,' like, 'Go get them and talk with them.' Yeah. Yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RR: It--. And--. Which I totally get, and then it- and then the- and then it gets around to, like, 'Who are your people?' [Laughs] because, you know, there's so many fractures. It's not like the white community is some monolithic thing. I'm Jewish-American, um, I--. There are a lot of white people who don't want anything to do with me, so, you know, who is getting my people? I will say though, um, last weekend, I went to my mother's hometown in rural West Tennessee for the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the synagogue where she grew up. So, it was built right on the heels of the civil war, and, um, when we went, there were all kinds of activities during the weekend. And one of them was a dedication of this little park right downtown because this town, Brownsville Tennessee, they're trying to revive their downtown like every little town and--. You know, they've re- everybody's realized the mistakes of the past that if you put the Wal-Mart out, you know, on the county line then you lose all your small businesses. Anyway, we were on the court square dedicating this little park where there used to be a Jewish department store and now it's a little park, and I look up and right in front of the court square is this huge confederate monument, and I was just like--. And I lived in this town when I was a child for six or eight years and I've never even had any idea what that was, or any of the monuments are, right? Now we have this--. People are

looking at all of this through, you know, new lenses. And, um--. So, I said to a lot of the folks that had come in for this event that, we, the Jewish-Americans associated with this synagogue, with this town, that we should take that statue down. Right? And I actually spoke to the African American mayor who was there that kind of grab hand and meet people kind of thing, that they shouldn't have to do that, that we should do it. Right? And so we're starting this chain of communication to talk about how we would be able to do that. Um, of course it's all a little sketchy and it turns out the conversations were already underway, um, and they're being really, I think, being kind of smart in that they want to have a plan so that, all of a sudden, they don't become this lightning rod. But, I think that's what you need. Right? Is it--? I shouldn't go to the mayor and say 'Hey, you should take that statue down.' Um, I think that we- if you wanted to do it, but... I don't know, but I don't want to do it in a way that-that the pe- that the- that the African Americans in the town don't agree with, because they have a lot at stake, obviously. So, we're kind of looking to them to...

KM: Mm-hmm.

DS: Are you all following the saga of the confederate monument on campus that's Silent Sam?

BG: Yeah.

KM: Mm-hmm.

OL: Some, not an awful lot (inaudible - 00:38:18) back and forth, yeah.

DS: My mess [Chuckles]

KM: Yeah.

BG: And is it- eh, is it basically stalled at the moment? The-the-the-the administration of the university just won't take action, is that what's happening?

DS: Yeah.

BG: Yeah.

DS: So--.

OL: I mean, it's--.

DS: In-in public, the chancellor says that she's- she wants it to be moved, but she feels that, um-. She's listening to her general council for the university, who says the way he interprets the law, that they can't move without the board of trustees and the board of governors giving them permission. And people are saying that, 'Well, the governor gave me the s- the soft ball to go, you know, just say safety,' and to do it, but our general council interprets the law one way and so that's why there's no movement. And it's just ge--.

RR: That's a real lack of courage there, if you ask me. I mean--.

DS: That's what everybody says. Yup, lack of courage.

RR: Move it and step down, move- it's just a--. I mean... wow.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

DS: I went to one of the presentations by the general council, and he-he stated, 'Well, if-if we take it down, then the board of governors will just put it back up.' And I wanted to say, 'Okay, we'll just take it down again. Let's play this out, because I don't think they will put it back up.' In 2017? There's no way.

BG: Or if they do, that (inaudible - 00:39:30) somebody will eventually (inaudible - 00:39:31). Right? It has to--. If for no other reason that it's, like, not pragmatic, it's too hard to do.

DS: But if someone said that the-the legislation, they wrote it horrifically brilliant, that in order to move it, it must go into a place of equal prominence, and it can't be a cemetery museum. So--.

BG: So, what is that? Yeah.

DS: Exactly. So they wrote it really, really--.

KM: Horrifically brilliant.

DS: Exactly.

BG: Yeah, I ran into those laws a little bit years ago. I was- I was working as the director of public art for the state in the Department of Cultural Resources, and-and so I was responsible for the state's public art collection. Uh, but I was not allowed to have any (inaudible - 00:40:13) or-or even really any part of the conversation with the monuments on the capitol grounds. That was like--. Extensively, it seemed like my job? But, it was not- that was not my job. You know, the very first ten days of being in office it was made very clear that that's a separate part and that's a historical commission and they have their own dialogues and rules about what those monuments can and can't do and what they're for. And then it (inaudible - 00:40:37) civil war, where they didn't, uh--. There's the war (inaudible - 00:40:40), but there was also those other stuff. Um, but it's-it's- it's this strange (inaudible - 00:40:45) self-protectionism about memory and history and how do you commemorate it? (inaudible - 00:40:56) permanence of it? When-when it just (inaudible - 00:40:58) that sanctity about history, or it's especially

contested history, it doesn't really make much sense today. In the context of memory and how we tell stories about ourselves and those stories change. Yes, they're a historical facts, but they need to be interpreted in present tense contexts. They're already (inaudible - 00:41:18).

DS: Well, I'm bias. I'm from up north, I'm from outside of Philadelphia, but it's the south. Like, she- the- the corporal was talking about the new south, theirs is the old south--. Just something about this-this war that just--. [Laughs] It's the baking, it's the baking powder. It's just baked in. Some people just feel it always has to be present, and as opposed to the United States, which is something about commemorating--. I mean, I just say, 'You know, in Germany, you don't have monuments to Adolf Hitler.' As in 'You gave a good fight, you did really--. But it's your loss, so now we're gonna put up a monument,' and then you just don't do it. That's what I can't understand. It's p- certainly not in a public square. You know, but it--. I don't know.

BG: But so many of them were installed so long that we (inaudible - 00:42:05). They weren't- they weren't- it wasn't 1869 that they were erected a few years after the war or whatever. It was 1925, you know, for--.

DS: Jim Crow.

BG: They're revisionists, s-s-specifically racists. Racist (inaudible - 00:42:20). It's- it's fascinating. And someone was saying yesterday in one of the panels, you know, something- these- they're- they were manufactured in the North, often these confederate statues, poorly made. I mean, you saw- you saw the video of the way the one crumpled and (inaudible - 00:42:32). It was just a really shitty piece of art.

KM: [Laughs] Yeah.

BG: Not only was it aesthetically, but, like, physically, it was poorly made. And then to be crushed [Laughs].

RR: Crumpled.

BG: Yeah. Incredible, it just- it crumpled. So, I mean--.

RR: But, a piece of aluminum foil.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

BG: So, they know even the value was--. Physical objects or art objects, they're- they're all- they're value is just for these people that feel that they need to be visible in order to justify their interpretation of history. It's just- it's so tenuous. It just seems to me just such a tenuous grasp on [Laughs] objecthood while it's there.

OL: Not-not just history, but the present.

BG: Yeah, exactly. Right. Yeah.

OL: It's in the present. Trump, whose name will not be spoken again...

KM: [Laughs]

DS: Forty Five. Call him Forty Five.

OL: What do you say about the, uh, Forty Five — asshole. To- about the, um, you know, this nonsense about the prote- taking a knee. He's talking to the crowd at his base in Alabama, talking about, you know, "Why is it that we people have to watch those people?"

DS: The code word.

OL: It's not about history, it's about right now.

DS: My question is--. Oh, go ahead.

OL: Well, it's just stunning- just stunning.

DS: *How might the changes to the Affordable Care Act affect you, your family, or your community?* Anybody here?

[Speakers intermittently agree]

BG: That's scary to me. I-I-I'm--. I own a small business, I own a record label, that's what I do most of the time, um, in addition to curating stuff like this where [Laughs] people ask me to. I need help with the curatorial projects and consulting projects, but mostly I have a record label, which is--.

RR: What's the name of it, (inaudible - 00:44:12)?

BG: It's called, *Paradise of Bachelors*. Uh, I'm into this contemporary music and archival historical music, but n--. Point being, you know, it's a very small (inaudible - 00:44:23) industry business. You know, there are artists--. Well, I don't make a lot of money, my wife has her own business in a real estate and design firm, and we're both working all the time. I mean, we have to buy healthcare on- in the federal marketplace, and every year it's a chore, signing up again. Th-that never quite works, we make- our income varies a lot year to year, so it's like the- our plans change every year (inaudible - 00:44:47), but nevertheless that saved us a lot of money, it allowed us to have a health care for us--.

RR: It has?

BG: Yeah, absolutely. And for our child, our four year old — who's about to be four. Um, and, uh--. You know, so I can complain about the-the mechanisms of it, but the fact that it's allowed us to have health insurance, which we can't get from our jobs (inaudible - 00:45:10). So, it's pretty scary to me, as much as I complain [Laughs] about

that system, what's gonna happen in the coming years for-for my family? And, um, you know, the better that I'm in here--. We're very lucky. You know? That-that we can even pay that reduced subsidized (inaudible - 00:45:28) um, that insurance premium. You know, they're a lot of people who don't have access to a computer to even sign up. You know? Or even if they get a subsidy, they-they can't pay for that, or not- you know, it's--. There are too many people falling into the cracks already that, um, the idea of eradicating the system which I--. T-to me, in my life, and I took--. Well, I know that demonstrably helps people. So--.

RR: I don't think they can do it.

BG: Yeah, I-I-I don't know. It doesn't seem like it.

RR: I don't think they can do it.

DS: You mean dismantle--?

RR: I don't think they can repeal it.

DS: Oh, no, they can't. Well not now after September 3rd, it won't.

RR: And I mean, thank-thank God that people rose up, they went into those town halls over the summer, and I was like--. Like, one of the few times where I was, like, proud of Americans, of all political stripes, 'cause it was deeply personal. And, uh--.

DS: I just think they're mean. I just think, 'Where is the humanity?' I- I don't get it.

RR: Well, it's corporate- it's corporate- I think it's just corporate interest, really.

DS: It's evil. It's evil.

KM: It- money profits- profits. You know? Things like that.

DS: Yes. Other people die.

BG: Yeah. And part of it- and part of it is that I think that reality when- in terms of race issues is that, I think the reality is, a lot of people hate it, Trump included, because Obama's name is attached to it. That's really what this is about. It's not how it functions.

OL: Absolutely, for Trump, especially.

RR: I mean, did you- did y'all read, uh--.

BG: It's because someone came up with "Obamacare."

RR: Did y'all read Coates' most recent piece in *The Atlantic*?

BG: No, I didn't. I didn't see it. Oh, yes, I did- I did. Right. Yes.

RR: But that-this-that-this presidency is literally a backlash to--.

DS: Everything that he did. They're just going down the list trying to eliminate it, trying to eliminate it.

RR: And of course, many people thought Obama- didn't know Obamacare was the Affordable Care Act.

[Crosstalk]

BG: That's the other weird thing. Yeah, Obamacare was this--. Just like a boogeyman.

RR: They're like 'Yeah, down with Obamacare', and then they were like, 'I love the Affordable Care Act.'

KM: Oh, Lord.

BG: That's how I get my insurance.

[Crosstalk ends]

RR: Yeah.

BG: Oh. my god.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

RR: And I actually think that's a really big part of it. Even --and I know this might sound like giving people too much credit-- but even people who misunderstand the civil war, just like a really deep, deep lack of education and understanding of history, and current events, um, and so just people still s-s-saying about Northern aggression, and states' rights, and not even really knowing just some of these catchphrases, thinking Obamacare- 'Down with Obamacare,' um--.

DS: Fighting against their own interests.

RR: Yeah, and-and so, um--.

DS: That's a part of that, uh, the racial equity? Is when--. I heard it stated, I've been reflecting on it now for about a week. The history of America is rich white men convincing not so rich white people that Brown and Black people are the enemy.

KM: Yes, yes. And, eh--. So, in that piece in *The Atlantic* that Coates wrote, he really talked about--. There was this point, um, where Black and white people were both enslaved in a sense, but then it became this point that the-the higher up whites started to make that distinction that, you know, they could be in servitude, but they weren't a slave and they started to make that distinction very much, so that even this- the-the class issues between white and Black Americans, even white and Black Americans of the same exact class, there was that victim mentality that 'I'm still better than you because of the color of my skin', and-and that is so disturbing to me.

DS: And the history of North Carolina, the fusion party. Where whites and Blacks of the same class were working together, driving politics and then the same thought of

fear. So, 'We got to separate the white and Blacks, and we can do that- we can make the white- poor white feel that he's better than the poor Black.'

KM: And there's histories of cla- of-of, um, like, the man pitting together, pitting races against races, even in, like, factories, like, poultry factories, um, where largely ma--.

OL: White male privilege.

KM: Uh, worked by African American workers, and when they started to organize their labor and demand better working practices, labour practices, uh, that's when, uh, the corporations started hiring undocumented immigrants, because they were trying to quell the uprising of-of workers who were saying, 'We need to fair rights.' And so, again, that's pitting--. You know, here come the undocumented immigrants looking for work, and African Americans are like--. You know? So that's pitting these- you know, making these internal struggles by somebody--. You know, by white--.

RR: Sure.

KM: People. So--.

OL: I spent most of my youth in rural South. Um, I say my youth until I was, I don't know, thirty-thirty- young thirties, um, and, uh, frequently doing construction work between degrees 'cause I liked it, like looking outside a lot. And it was all--. You know, it don't think that it's changed, but white Southern men, their attitudes about labor were consistently against their own self-interests. And it was just--. Y-you couldn't persuade them about anything.

RR: Like anti-union... Yeah.

OL: Oh, heavily, no, but (inaudible - 00:50:50) union- er, union--. I mean, that was- that was like--.

DS: This has been great. Nice meeting you all.

OL: Nice to meet you.

KM: Y'all, I have to run. I'm so sorry, Oren. It's a pleasure to meet you.

OL: Yeah. Take care.

KM: Bye-bye.

RR: Yeah, I gotta go, too.

OL: You- you're listening.

BG: What's up?

OL: Do we turn this off? Is it off?

BG: It's still goin'. You can go.

OL: I'm done. I'm eating.

BG: Um--.

RR: I have to go, too.

OL: Oh, you do? Okay.

RR: See you back at work in [Mic movement] fifteen minutes--.

BG: Okay.

RR: Across the street.

OL: Is this the stop button?

IGX_092917_PPL1

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by Andres Molina 03/25/2021

To be copyedited.