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BONNIE BOGEN
SHANNON FORD
CHERYL LEWIS
HELEN STACKHOUSE (A.M. Hassan)
LEXUS PHILLIPS
DAVE RAGLAND
Length: 01:08:33

Preface

The following conversation was hosted at Vanderbilt University, facilitated by Kevin Whiteneir. 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 RECORDING

KEVIN WHITENEIR: You guys are ready to go. This is table number 16. Um, just to get started, introduce yourselves. Your first name, your last name, something you would tell a person you've never sat at a table with about yourself. And then feel free to crack right into these cards on the table. Thanks, you guys.

LP: When we did the little thing where they were like, 'What type of person are you in a conversation?' And I said like a talkative, moderator-ish person. So, uh, I'll say my name first. Um, I'm Lex, or Lexus. I am from Memphis, Tennessee. And I am a poet that likes to work with young people, as well as older people, um, about using art to empower community.

BB: My name is Bonnie. I, uh, live in East Nashville. I've been very active in that community for the past ten years. Formed a Community Bridge there and working in nonprofits. And now I'm working with Tennessee Craft on, um, expanding our membership across the state.

AMH: I am A.M. Hassan. That is my artist name. I hope to turn it into my brand. My name is Helen Stackhouse. Uh, I'm an artist. I do visual art. Um, I paint on fabrics. Uh, wall murals. And, um, I'm here so that I can help to, uh, change the culture in America for the better instead of going downhill like we're doing. [Laughs]. And all artists need a voice, and I'm glad to see us getting organized. And one of my goals is to start a, uh, housing for artists. Basically, low income, which most of us are, and homeless artists.

DR: All right. Hello, everyone. I am Dave Ragland. Native of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Based here in Nashville. I'm the artistic director of Inversion Vocal Ensemble, as well as the Diaspora Orchestra, the predominantly Black orchestra here in Nashville. I'm a Emmy nominated composer and conductor and musician. Too many jobs [Laughs]. I work entirely too many jobs, but yeah. So I'm glad to be here with you all.

SF: I can't follow that up. Um, I'm Shannon Ford. I am the director of community arts development for the Tennessee Arts Commission. Um, and I basically work to support, um, access to and participation in the arts.

CL: And I'm Cheryl Lewis. Um, I've lived in Birmingham, Alabama for the past twenty years. I work for Space One Eleven. We're a visual arts nonprofit. We have exhibition opportunities for artists. We, um, have an education program mainly for young children, grades two through twelve and adults aged fifty-five and better.

SF: Oh, wow.

LP: Um, so during lunch we can, we start with the cards, but we can sidebar. We can talk... I won't pick the first card, if anyone wanna pick a card?

CL: I love the design of the--,

LP: Right? Two cards, all right.

DR: Oh, let's do this one. *What kind of public art do you find valuable?* It says in this city, but I guess we'll say our respective cities. *What kind of public art do you find valuable?*

CL: I think a valuable public art is one that was integrative into the plan, um, before it happened and not an afterthought. 'Cause I think a lot of organizations, uh, come up with a plan and then they say, 'Oh, we need a piece of a sculpture or something. Let's go ahead and do that.' So I think that as an arts organization we always—and we're advocates for, um, artists and um, we do see that a lot where there's a community plan, um, art just seems to be an afterthought.

LP: This is Lexus. So, question. So you mean more like a, like there might, kind of what Fabiana was talking about earlier like, 'Oh, we like add the art thing,' rather than encompassing it--,

CL: Right.

LP: As something that's like essential to the project.

CL: It's integral to the project, right.

LP: Okay.

CL: Right. And art should be part—it could be a consideration every time of every project.

SF: Um, this is Shannon. Um, I think that the public art that I find most rewarding is where, um, the community is involved in the creation and curation of the piece itself. Um, where it's a collaborative outgrowth of what the community's aspirations and ideas are and the artist as a vehicle.

BB: This is Bonnie. Uh, being a historian, I like art that speaks to the history of the place. I think it's important that we know about the history of the people and things that have happened in the places that we are. And so, uh, I really value art that speaks to that.

AMH: Well, I think that my favorite piece of public art is the dragon in Fannie Mae Dees Park here in Nashville because everybody got a chance to participate in the creation of the art. And I think art where everybody gets to participate is the best, because art lasts. If you do something that's going to stay there and be there for the next fifty years and not fall apart, then, you know, you can bring your children, your grandchildren, and say, 'Hey, I put that right there on this piece of art.' You know? 'I actually placed that myself.' Or, 'I drew that.' So, I think that public art should be by the public, you know, designed to be actually created by the public. And part of any new building projects or, especially any public buildings, there should be art inside and out that's done by someone in the community or as a collaborative effort by a group of maybe a community center or, you know, individual artists or a group of artists should get together and do something for every new building that is done with public funds.

DR: And the great thing—well, Dave here—the great thing about art is that you know, it's visual, but we can also include music into that as well--,

AMH: Yes.

DR: And dance. Um, the project that I worked on last year, I think maybe one of the biggest ones to date was the Nick Cave, uh, featuring Nashville. Maybe you all saw that. Well, so the international artist, Nick Cave, wonderful artwork in his sound suits. And he's just a visual artist with movement and sound, and all of that. So, he likes to go into communities and do his presentations there as a culmination of his exhibit. So, he was on exhibit at The Frist for all of, pretty much all of last year and some of the year before that. So, the culminating event was a performance at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center that inhabited—he had poets, dancers, uh, singers, choirs. He had

TSU Meistersingers, my group Inversion, dance companies from Austin P, from MTSU. And so many community groups who helped to make like blankets for the first act of this display. And so afterwards, there was this huge talk back with Nick and all of us just sitting onstage at like one of the most expensive buildings [Laughs] in Nashville and one of the most beautiful concert halls in the world. And I remember Nick specifically challenged us to make sure that this was not the last time that there's a, you know, conglomeration of the community together to do some sort of artwork. So, I definitely, you know, in my own mission, taken that into respect. Um, yeah, and just kind of continue on with collaboration with you know, music, art, dance. It all intermingles. It all intertwines.

AMH: Yeah, I'm one of the artists in the arts collective at Poverty and the Arts is I helped make one of those blankets.

Unknown: Hmm.

AMH: And then--,

DR: That's how I know you.

AMH: Yeah.

DR: That's how I know you.

Unknown: [Laughs]

AMH: Yeah, there were three or four--,

DR: I know you.

AMH: Of our artists that went onstage--,

DR: Yes.

AMH: And they put a blanket over, uh, Nick. And--,

DR: Yeah, mm-hmm.

AMH: And yeah, yeah.

DR: And I was back, I was behind them feathers.

[Laughter]

AMH: You were back in feathers.

DR: So I couldn't see you, yeah.

AMH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We were, we were way up in the balcony. But our organization actively participated in the creation of the performance.

LP: Um, this is Lex. I'm a poet so when I--, I guess my art, it's like when I think about pu, what it's asking, like public art, um, I think what you're saying about music. It's like it's something that, like, unlike visual art where you create it and then it remains in a space. Like, music or-or poetry or, the public art of it, is the performance of it. And then, what you're saying about how, um, they didn't want that to be the last space where that comes together. And having that art and then having the talk back, um, that's what, that's how I think of the-the value and the public art that I share is-is like what conversation does it facilitate afterward. Um, because a lot of the time when I'm sharing it's meant to be kind of like that, like a workshop space where, say, we open with a performance of something. And then what follows is like breakout groups where, okay, the groups talk about what did that piece bring up, or they get into making their own poems, or things like that. I think the-the public art part is, is how does that sharing kind of open that space or create that space for what conversation you're intending to follow. Um, so for me it's kind of like how well did I meet that intention of how I'm waiting -- like

you can't control where the conversation goes afterward. Like, you know, like did I, did I reach that space I was hoping to to open people up to a conversation.

AMH: Yeah, I think that—this is A.M. Hassan. Um, I think that uh, poetry could also be visual.

LP: That's true.

AMH: Especially if you build a public building and you have etched in stone--,

LP: That's true.

AMH: On the walls around, you know. Poetry from people in the community. I think, 'cause that will last a long time. I mean like people go to Washington to read, uh, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address or something, you know? So, yeah, I think poetry should be more visual than it is, because it's such a part of our everyday life.

LP: Any thoughts to our first question? [Pause] I'll go to the next card. Um, *How is Black life part of your daily life? Discuss spiritual, physical, mental wellbeing.* Uh. [Pause] *How is Black life part of your daily life? Discuss spiritual, physical and mental wellbeing.* Uh, I suppose our table isn't completely Black, so I guess we could talk about that from a couple different angles. Um. [Pause] Um, it's my living. So, um, spiritually, uh, I think a lot ancestrally. Like how do my ancestors impact where I am now and where I hope to be. Um, I firmly believe that they are always with me. Um, and that I am acting out things that they visioned. Um, and I take that as a responsibility, um, to their dreams as an artist as well. Um, physically, um, it navigates how I move through the world. Um, it navigates style and culture. Like these edges of gel, you can't see that on the audio. Like it-it-it navigates my physical space, like how I show up in the world. Um, in Blackness, like culture, nails, hair, braids. You know, like that empowers me in my

physical space. Um, and then mentally I think I connect that to spiritually. Um, hmm. I think it's always a part of my, my wellbeing. Like how do I have to particularly navigate, one, mental wellbeing as a Black queer woman. It's like okay, what does that mean for me to be mentally well? What, what steps do I need to take in my day to day life to feel well? Um, and that can feel different from my life, compared to other people of any race. So, yeah.

AMH: Well, for me it's like, uh, this is A.M. Hassan. Uh, let me look at this again. *How is Black life part of your daily life?* Actually it's part of my daily life because I identify as what you call a Black person. Um, because I know that the great, greatest percentage of me is, although I happen to know I have Indian Cherokee ancestors. And some of my ancestors were Caucasian. So, even though I am what is referred to as Black, uh, my skin tone kind of puts me into uh, [Pause] A lot of racists have a problem—even when I was growing I realized that even some Black people had a problem with my skin tone. You know, I'm just as Black as they are. I mean, you know, everybody else want to, um, everything, you know that's going on. But then I know that I, uh, the way I present myself, I am, I guess what you call Heinz 57 because I like associating with people of all uh, nationalities. And I enjoy the differences. I just don't stick with just people in my, what they call the Black culture. I like going outside the box. You know, don't box me in. Don't just put me in the Black box. I'm not there. That's not me. Um, as a matter of fact, I ended up marrying a Caucasian for the last thirty one years. So, hey, I mean, it's just me. And I'm enjoy being around people who are not just in one little category. You know, don't box me in. And I-I have a way of spilling out into--,
[Laughter]

AMH: My cup overflows into everybody here, you know? So, yeah. Um, my spiritual well being depends on the connecting with my creator in the way that I choose and a lot—and enjoying and allowing others to express themselves because I want them to be able to help let me express myself. So, yeah. You know, I-I like being in different groups of people. You know, don't just hem me in cause that's, that's just not me.

DR: Oh, oh, on this. This, I thought I got to go for this. Alright, so -- I-I'm Dave, for the recorder okay. Uh, for me there's a lot for me to unpack with this. There's a whole lot. [Laughs] But, uh, I'll-I'll just break it down like this. Um, in that there's a project that I'm considering doing hopefully within the next year or year [inaudible: 00:17:21.12], next year, 2020. Um, the work, Seven Last Words, and, um, it's a work -- everybody sort of like Seven Last Words of Christ, right? Um, Dubois, and, okay. So the Seven Last words of the Unarmed which is a core work based on the words of the last words of Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant, Eric Garner, um, people who've been killed by police. So, so Last Words and is made to -- it's a beautifully moving piece. Um, it was done, I want to say last year, here by Intersection. Kelly Corcoran's ensemble. And I was part of the chorus for that. And it's going to be done again in about two months by Nashville Concerto Orchestra here. Um, so, I'm saying all of that to say that, you know, because of Diaspora Orchestra, I'm considering doing it, um, humming it to myself. Myself and I'm going to be conducting here as well. Um, but with an all Black male orchestra, all Black male chorus, and I want to incorporate, um, all Black male dancers and artists and poets too as well.

Unknown: Mm hmm.

DR: Reason being, because, um, and we talk about this in kind of last session. It's real easy for Black art to get the white, as Toni Morrison calls it, the "white gaze." G-A-Z-E.

Unknown: Mm hmm.

DR: The white art being looked upon through, you know, certain spectrum, certain--,

Unknown: Yeah. Yeah.

DR: Critical lens. Um, with this one I want to include these elements of the poets, of the dancers, because if we're going to celebrate the men, I want to honor their lives. Not just let it be said that Black men's last words were—unintended last words—at the hands of police. And the thing with a lot of, you know, the narrative in our school, Black people, but I stand for Black men, you know, you always get *TWELVE YEARS A SLAVE*. In opera, we have you know, [inaudible: 00:19:25.04]. Things to talk about, you know, where we've been. But I'm really looking at art where there talks about what Black people or Black men can be. So, with this work with the Seven Last Words, I want to present it with um, all Black men so we can kind of honor our own, but also the second movement be about light and life. You know, who are we? You know what can we do ? You know what is, what is the future? If we didn't, you know, if we weren't you know, being followed, you know, every time we go into a store. If we weren't, people didn't lock their doors every time I walk by. If you know, what is, you know, what is me in my truest being? And so, that's kind of the question now that with this generation coming up it's, you know, we're asking that. You know, what's, you know what's that, what is the answer to that?

AMH: Sounds good. Because it is a problem. And I believe that because of our past, the history of our past as-as uh, people of color that we do need to emphasize what is being done to keep us under a certain level of society financially, culturally, everything. I mean, we need intensive care.

DR: Yes.

AMH: Because we've been, I think injured so long till it's hard we -- it's still trying to recover from what was done to us physically and psychologically during slavery. I have a friend who calls it the "post slavery syndrome."

Unknown: Mm hmm.

AMH: We just have---, we have to get uh, out in, not only our mindset, but the perpetrators of the wrong. They have to change their mindset to realize that we're all humans. We're all sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. So, why would you do something hurtful to your brother? I mean, this— or your sister? I mean, we're all the humans. I mean, we have to, us humans, need to be sticking together instead of dividing up. Because you got this divide and conquer thing, you know? So, uh, you know we—And everybody's mindset is gonna have to change. Because one thing I found out is that most the everyday, average Caucasian doesn't realize what happened during slavery. They he--, they see it in the books. And they have the, you know, we should, happy, singing, you know. They, singing people and we took care of them and they worked for us. And they were in the fields and they were happy and singing and la, la, la. Well, what-what we, uh, we, what -- I got married and my husband saw *Roots*. It was on TV. And he just, he was devastated. He did not realize that any human -- he said 'how could anybody treat anybody like that?' He did--, it just broke his heart. He did not, he didn't, because before then he didn't understand that. And he wasn't raised in a racist family. You know, that type of thing, you know? It was a culture shock when he moved from California to Tennessee. You know? And went up against all this going on. Especially with him being in, the only Caucasian in a Black family. And he had to--, he witnessed first hand the stuff that we go through every day.

Unknown: Mmm hmm.

AMH: And, uh, so and it starts young. I mean, there's reverse racism. Like he was walking home from work one day, going to the bus stop, and was two little, uh, African American kids in the yard. They start throwing rocks at him and calling him

names just cause he's a white man walking by their yard. And they didn't know he had five Black children he take care of. You know? People make assumptions because of color or because of what they have been taught. So, what you're doing is wonderful. And, you know, I hope you every success in getting it together and getting it out there nationally. Because at least you've been nominated and people know your name. And when they see that you're doing something they might pay attention and actually put it on TV or something. You know? Because this, we've got to get over this racism thing. I was reading an article, it's June of last year's National Geographic. Scientists had proved there's no such thing as racism. I'm going 'what?' I was at the library. It's the June, June National Geographic. 'Cause I collect old National Geographic. Every time I see one I got to see what's in them. And they had traced the ancestry and everything. And they did it by skin tone. And all of these people, when they traced it they basically came to the conclusion that there's no such thing as racism. Everybody's the same. It's just a genetic mutation according to where your ancestor is. So they proved that everybody's the same under their skin. So, the world needs to just get over it.

[Laughter]

AMH: You know? You know? We can't just keep mistreating people just because of where they came from or anything like that. It's just wrong. Okay, see you.

BB: Bye.

SF: I guess we should answer this as well. Um, *How is Black life part of your daily life? Discuss spiritual, physical, mental wellbeing.* Um, this is Shannon. Um, and I guess the way that Black life is part of my daily life is that, you know, I-I've had friends, I've had neighbors, I've had schoolmates. I've been the, you know, uh, minority in

majority Black uh, situations, neighborhoods, schools. Uh, that's, that's occurred my whole life. And so in some ways it's never far from my thoughts, you know, how people treat people based on perceived differences. And um, I-I've been on the receiving end of you know, the sort of misconceptions. I've had those misconceptions. I've had to recover from having those misconceptions. I've had to recognize racism in my own family. And try to re-educate. Um, so it's it's something that I struggle with every day because I find it just so troubling that people hold onto really ill conceived hate. And I, um, and it, and it's not just about outward um, racism. It's the institutionalization of it.

Unknown: Right.

SF: It's the-the economics that perpetuate inequality that really troubled me. And, and I've been looking for a way for a long time. I mean, obvious, I work, I work for the Tennessee Arts Commission. I work for government. I'm trying to make a difference for people who experience inequality. Um, but, you know, I've seen a lot of change in my nearly fifty years and have seen a lot of things staying the same. And, and I can't quite figure out why people hold onto the same notions and misconceptions and fears. It's something that, it's just not, um—doesn't make sense to me, but I also want to find a way to, um, productively talk about it. And it's- and it's a difficult thing. Uh, so, I, um, and and the thing that's, that's really the most profound to me is that, you know, it's exactly what you were saying. You know? We're no different. We're just human beings. I mean, and struggle is struggle. Um, joy is joy. And why people can't just simply, um, share those with each other without pitting each other against each other for, for superficial reasons is, is, is something that is still mysterious to me. That's [inaudible: 00:30:26.28], so...

CL: This is hard for me. This is Cheryl. Um, 'cause Black life is not a part of my daily life. I just don't feel like I can speak to that. Um, I used to think I, oh, I could imagine how awful it is to be treated, um, differently because of the color of my skin. Um, but then I started learning things like from a friend who would say, well, you know, a band aid doesn't even match my skin. You know you don't think about things that you don't know about. Or if I lived in Massachusetts, how far I'd have to go to a drugstore to find makeup that I could wear? Or underclothing? Um, so, it's something I can't um, I just -- I know I can't imagine it. I just, as much as I try, I just can't. Um, but [inaudible: 00:31:29.22] might try to also be, um, you know, cognizant of the fact that um, if I see something I need to speak out. Um, you know the institutional racism. Um, and so yeah, that's, you know, we're just all trying to do the best we can and when we see something that shouldn't be we do what we can to-to say that's, that that's wrong.

BB: This is Bonnie. Um, y'all will find this kind of amusing. I don't know, maybe. Well, I did my 23andMe last year. And always assume that we had some more interesting history than just being purely European, because my mom and her siblings were so dark skinned. Um, and I, she always said she was, uh, Native American. And I was like, 'yeah, I think you might be in for a surprise when you do your 23andMe.' But 'no, we were just like so European.' And I was like, 'wow, that makes me really dull and like--,'

[Laughter]

BB: I don't know, just you know, I felt like, I felt disappointed that like you know, that I am just purely lined up with a race that has oppressed people so much over the, all of history. So, um, and I just didn't feel like I connected with that. Like that just wasn't

who I was. Um, that's just not the relationships I pursued, the places that I've lived. Um, I've been in New York City for the first half of my adult life in Brooklyn. And New York is just such a different place. It's, you know, people from all over the world. And it's, I, it's a place that I can most imagine that everybody kind of gets a fair shake. Like, that, you know, if you work hard there that there are opportunities for you. And that was my experience. And um, I think about it. I think about the different experiences of my Black neighbors and my white neighbors in East Nashville, because my neighborhood was majority African American probably when I moved there and I don't know that it is now. So, I have this like what is my role in the gentrification of this neighborhood where I moved because it was a historic neighborhood. It was diverse. I had moved straight from Brooklyn, the most diverse zip code in the nation. And I was raising my kids and I didn't want to raise them just with people who were white. Um, and so I got really involved in the neighborhood. And I've worked, um, until this past year, in a nonprofit where over 90 percent of the kids were African American. And um, and then I moved this past year into a nonprofit where over 90 percent of the artist members are white. And so, that was just like, it's been in my face ever since, you know, I walk in that like this is not okay and this has got to change. So, like you know, they immediately put me on the renamed "diversity committee." It's not a community.

[Laughter]

BB: But it's like, you know, every day—it's not what I work on every day in my job. My job has a lot of other parts, but everyday I'm like 'why are we not, why--, why are these artists around us? Why are these artists across the state and not a part of our organization?' Like what have we done over the years that we've excluded people. And, so that's part of my work. I think probably where I connect aside from just my neighbors, you know, and seeing like how life is different for my neighbors versus me. And like children in my neighborhood versus the opportunities maybe that my children have just by virtue of being born white. Um, it's really glaring. And, I mean it's just right there, everyday. Um, I actually, interestingly enough, have been helping start a church which is in you know, as most churches are, like long established churches, it's pretty segregated. Um, the denomination, I mean not-not in philosophy, but just in reality, the denomination's tend to be kind of segregated. And this one um, meets at an African American Episcopal Church which is across the street from my house. So I lucked out there cause it's super close. Um, and just navigating that relationship, um, where a lot of the people who go to that church no longer live in the neighborhood because they, you know, have been no-not in all cases forced out of the neighborhood but just, you know, their communities have moved elsewhere. And their relationships are elsewhere. And they're still active in this church but, um, but they still have a building. And a building in Nashville now is really hard to come by. So, they kind of have, you know, it's this weird like antidote to the gentrification of the neighborhood where like they have a power position of having a building. And when we enter into this relationship it is, it is always intended to come in a place of humility. Where reconciliation in the church has often been led by white people trying to, you know, appease our consciences or whatever.

And here we're just like, 'What, you know, do you need? Like, how can we incorporate ourselves into you. You lead the way. Like, this is your space and we're just here to, you know, be servants.' Um, and so that's, that's probably the way in which I'm constantly, because I'm one of the founders of this church, constantly engaging. And that, uh, how is that experience different? And, um, it, cause I believe that God is colorblind and like in my own personal spirituality, I wouldn't say that like Black life enters in because I don't feel like God sees, um, His children as like certain races. He sees our like experiences that come out of the, you know, how we are born. Not, you know, whether we have disabilities or whatever. Um, but, but um, I think God wants me spiritually to build those bridges. And, um, that's why I'm in that place now.

AMH: That's interesting. Because I grew up in the African American Episcopal Church. And the church was founded because they were worshiping in, uh, a white church. And [Pause] they was praying and one day, one Sunday the people got there early. And they tried to make the African Americans get up from, in the middle of prayer. 'Get up off your knees. We're here now. You have to leave.' So that's why you have an African American Episcopal Church. Because it's an old church. So, yeah. And it's interesting that now you're worshiping in what was traditionally African American church and you're trying to bridge that gap that was created by people who were racists. And then would not pray in the same church. You know, they let them come before church services started and, and use the church. But they wouldn't pray in the same church with them. So, that is wonderful. [Laughs] I'm glad you're there.

[Laughter]

LP: Um, this is Lex. I think that, I think that like it's go--, like in terms of, one, like you all's willingness to answer the question, 'cause y'all could have just been like, 'well, this question doesn't really apply to us. We're just going to like eh, eh, eh.' Um, honestly, so where you feel like, like you can't say that it doesn't. Um, and like I think like -- I think there's a lot to be said about not just being like, 'oh, like life sucks for Black people. Waa, waa.' And then just like going about your day. Like I think that people who are actually doing something about it is what matters. So, it's kind of like what you saying about like having conversations with your family members. Like, the reality is that like if I saw your family members in a grocery store they might never talk to me. You know what I'm saying? So, it's like that's how, you know, like a lot of people in Black organizing spaces that can say like racism really is where like white people start talking to other white people because it's true. Because if you're racist then you're probably not going to talk to Black people in the first place. So, like--,

AMH: Yeah.

LP: It kind of ends up being like those conversations that are had are really making more change than I probably ever could just like being somewhere protesting and being like, 'Oh, this is my life. This is my experience.' It sounds very different coming from someone that's like, 'Hey,' like, 'Hello, fellow white person. No, that's not okay. We don't do that to other people 'cause they're people. Maybe we should talk about that.' Like I think that, like that that matters. That I think that considering where in your life, you either do or don't see—like asking yourself, 'Where is my life not diverse and maybe I should do that. I should do something about that,' I think is valuable. 'Cause I think earlier—t's interesting, 'cause earlier at the table when we had our other

cards they were asking how do we feel like polarization of—how do we feel like the polarization of politics have benefitted or challenged our practice, whatever our artist practice is. Um, I feel like polarization makes it so that like we don't actually have conversations in person. Like, I do not talk to white people very often. And that's just the truth. That like we are not often in the space to do so. Um, and that when we are, it's like this place is really like, you know, like, it's like yeah, it's like my skin is brown. Your skin is not. Yeah. I think that it, yeah, I think that a lot of the times I feel like um, polarization by the powers that be, by the powers that be usually, I mean like, older white men sitting in rooms that like don't want things to change 'cause they make the most money off of it. Like--,

AMH: Mm-hmm.

LP: I think that polarization, a lot of people really, really supports that for them. Like it keeps things the way that they are. I think it keeps um, Black people, it keeps us feeling like we can't really progress and that things are dismal. Um, it keeps white people being like, 'Well, that sucks, but you know, that sucks.' Like, and I think that, um, even as a person of color with other people of color, I experience thinking about how my movements feel like they have to be so separate from other communities' movements where it's like, this, the-that uh, there's something who says like, all of our change, that we're not free and someone else if someone is still left not free. So, I as a Black person even think about other communities and how, like I guess like what we, how we'll define what are Black issues, what are Latinx issues, what are LGBTQ issues. Like, I see how polarization can make me not consider like what is Native American life like? What, like, to be honest I think about that a lot, that like the Native Americans were the first people

here, and we barely talk about anything they're going through. Like there literally are reservations where people just say, like 'Oh, this is land that we gave you. But oh, never mind.' Like, I think a lot about like when we think about like Black life and we think about -- it makes me think about like how, how do we just... I think it just is broadly asking the question like, wow, like how do we, like how often do we just sit as human beings and think about like how is life, how is the, the quality of life of just other humans, period, being affected? I think it just matters that we start to think about that. Like--,

AMH: Yeah.

LP: And that we, we make it our own purpose goal to-to-to diversify exp -- what you're saying about wanting your kids to grow up in diversity -- I think that's extremely powerful. Because it just like they can go somewhere and be like, "Yeah." I, you know, I think a lot. I work with young people a lot, like and I mean like kindergarten, first grade. And I see them all play together and it just, it really does something to me because it's like, wow, I-I think about how-how painful that feels to imagine that in a few years, like they won't even live in the same neighborhoods and like they won't even like—they'll be like, 'Oh, yeah, in kindergarten I had this one friend,' but the nature of their lives will take a course that they never interact again. Um, so I think a lot about how like little kids feel none of this tension that we feel. They don't, they don't feel it. Because it's not, it's not been taught to them yet. Um, so I think a lot about just like, yeah, like how are we -- like how, how often do we in our daily life just take into consideration like wow, this sucks for this other group of people. How might I be able to do something about that? Um, and that's any community. Any, the po--, the positions of privilege that we have, the positions, like in any way just thinking like how can I from my space of privilege that I

have think about what something is like for another group of people and do something about it? Um, so yeah, I really, I think this question could apply to like how do we consider how a-a lot of other people's lives are, experiences are. And what are we doing? 'Cause there things, like what you were talking about, like disability. Like, thinking about things that we just don't consider in our day to day that just, they don't cross our mind 'cause it's not our lives. Like, how do we just become more considerate human beings? Like, that everybody should just have the same chance to do, to live the same fulfilled lives that we live. Um, yeah. So I think that like starting to ask the question, starting to talk to people in your family, starting to like talk to them 'cause the reality is that they might not talk to me, is important. Like--,

BB: Mm-hmm.

LP: It's true.

BB: This is Bonnie. And I just want to follow up. And I-I feel like sometimes like a bridge in that way.

LP: Yeah.

BB: Like, um, there was some violence in -- several months ago and I wrote on my Facebook page, um, you know, this was perpetrated against someone because they were Black. And somebody -- I worship in an AME Church every Sunday afternoon. And somebody could walk in there expecting to find a bunch of Black people that they were just going to commit violence against because they were Black and find white people in there. And you know, just to try to like throw out a story that change-- disrupts the narrative. Like now you're thinking about your cousin or your niece, you know? That somebody could do something because they have these, these hateful thoughts and motivations. And of course you don't ever think it will happen to anyone in our family because all your family members are white. But, you know, you are in a place where somebody's motivated by that. It just, you know, it disrupts the narrative that they feel safe and they don't ever have to worry about that concern. And, you know, my family is like -- most of them live in rural Kentucky and um, so I just feel like, you know, that's a platform for me.

LP: Yes.

BB: Like to be able to express um, the opportunity that there is to like see outside of your small, you know, world view.

LP: [inaudible: 00:47:39.27]

BB: To something bigger. And I think that's the biggest thing. Is to just get outside of your comfort zone.

LP: Yeah, 'cause it—this is Lex—um, 'cause the reality is that like a lot of it just happens because we literally just, by nature of systemic things, we just literally don't even live in the same areas. We don't go to the same grocery stores. We don't go to the same churches. Like, I was in Western Massachusetts for a while and it was like one of the most like liberal places I've been, and I'm talking like white people like doing anti-racist work, like everything. And then, but just, just the nature of just the demographics in Western Massachusetts, like it's not that they're not trying to include Black people, there just are no Black people.

[Laughter]

LP: They're just, they're just not there. So it's like--,

AMH: They're going to go find some Black people to communicate.

LP: Yeah, yeah. So it was like I was there and it's like I found myself often being the only Black person in the rooms that I went in. And that was an experience for me to have to, to be seen in a way that's just like, 'Okay, I'm, like [inaudible: 00:48:33.01] y'all see me. Like, I'm here.' Um, but it was just like a white people doing anti-racist work, it's like I still would like say 'hi' to them and they still be like, '[Pause] Hi?' and it's just like--,

AMH: Oh, a Black person spoke to me.

LP: Yeah, so I think it's just, I think we really just need to interact more. Like, and it would make, it would make it just being so much more normal to be like, 'Hey, I should say something about somebody else not treating this other human well.' Like it would just make it, it would make it less like 'oh my gosh.' Like this is a person treating a person of the immigrant community not well. This is a person treating a LGBTQ person not well. This is a person treating a Black person not well. Like I feel like if we all just continue to actually become in community with each other, it would just become so much more normalized to just anybody for anybody to be like, 'Hey, that's not cool.'

AMH: Yeah.

LP: And just, yeah. So, I really just wanted -- that's what it is. Like, it's like the powers that be have just like separated us and now it's just this like--,

AMH: We're all trying to get back together.

LP: Yeah.

AMH: Really, it's what's happening is we've been in this separatist mindset by the people at the top that keep us divided and now it's gotten to where it's more economic than racist.

LP: Yeah, it's power that keep us separate.

AMH: Yeah, they're, they're try to keep enough uh, poor people at the bottom--,

LP: Mm-hmm.

AMH: To work for them so they can make the money. And they don't care what color.

LP: Yeah.

AMH: The people are.

LP: But it makes the poor Black, white people and the poor Black people so like they're not the same and it's like they're, if they talked, if they shared art they would find that they're both experiencing--,

AMH: Uh huh.

LP: Dismal poverty. Like it, like, and they'd realize and be like: 'hey, wait a minute, you know? '

AMH: Mm hmm.

LP: Like, it just--,

SF: But I think, I think that's the point though. This is Shannon. Um, I think that um, when it comes to, you know, power structures, the idea is that you divide people in order to keep them powerless. And, um, and especially when it comes to American culture. We're not comfortable unless we have an enemy. I mean, and when we don't have an overt a, outside enemy like, you know, the Soviet Union used to be. We turn in on ourselves. And we have, we have more and more divisions within. Um, and I, and it-it's something that is, I think, not just a tendency, but is a real overt strategy to really keep institutional power the way it is. Uh, and, and especially at -- I hate to say it because I'm not a conservative. I think conservatives are um, extremely adept at making sure that people who are not within their, um, what would you say, uh, their group, making sure that they're really demonized to their fellow people that they want in the club.

LP: Right, and then like -- um, Audre Lorde, she's a great queer author, writer, poet, essayist, everything. She really talks about--, she talks a lot, a lot about difference. And she says that it is not our differences that divide us, but our inability to uplift and celebrate those differences. Um, that it's okay that we're different. Like it's—like, I, as a Black person, eat different foods than an Asian person. I, as a Black person, I have a different clothing style than a Latinx person. I as a, as a queer woman, have different relationships than non queer people. Like it, and it, and it becomes like I think it's like, it's, it's like there's this really, really weird desire for like sameness. That like it actually would be cool, like if we, if we actually just let everybody be different we'd actually just like--,

Unknown: Right.

LP: Try different foods and hear different music. And--,

Unknown: Right.

LP: And do different dances and try different clothes and like enjoy it. And like and then like whiteness in particular, like whiteness as a concept is that it's like -- really, on before, when white people first came to the US they didn't identify as white. They identified as wherever they came from. Like they identified as Polish. They identified as Irish. They identified as, as, as German. They identified as British.

Unknown: Right.

LP: And like with that they had culture. Like they had German food and British food and Irish food and like--, but then when-when you came to America there had to be an enemy so it like, it became -- like cause that's what happened. At first Irish people were the ones getting discriminated against. At first Polish people were in the slums. Like, you know? And so it's like whiteness had to become this thing that created a "us" and a "them." So it was like, okay, so all the white people we're going to lose our German, British, Dutch, Irish culture, and we're just going to all be white. Whatever, and create an assumption of a culture for that when it's like is there one? Because it just became a tool of power to create a "us" and a "them". So it's like, like, like doing your ancestry, it's like like, like did you find out like what country specifically you were--,

BB: We were mostly British.

LP: So, like, so like what if you were to like--,

BB: We're just like so British, like ninety eight percent British.

LP: Take out British food or to like listen to British like wouldn't we want to just embrace the fact that we're different and that it wasn't like everybody's got to be the same for everybody thing to be okay. It's like--,

Unknown: Yeah.

LP: Like do you know how many great potlucks we would have if like everybody just brought their food, like yeah. Like, and so I think that --,

[Laughter]

LP: Really though.

Unknown: Yes.

LP: Do you know how many great potlucks we would have if everybody just brought their food. Like we're, our organization is planning an international festival right now. And that was a question we were having, we asked. We were like do we, are we including European countries too? Like, like, by internationale like are we including everything? Because it's like I think that there would just be like if we, if we accepted that it's okay that we're different.

Unknown: Mm hmm.

LP: It wouldn't feel like we're trying to like force it. Like we are, we started out as peoples in one place on the earth, when the earth was one big thing. Then we moved. And because of weather our skin tones changed. And then because of where we were we adapted in eight different foods and started to play different music. And like it, like it's okay. Like we-we evolved and we developed our own spaces. And it's okay if we were to just embrace that and connect them and talk about them. And talk about where they are similar and talk about where they are different. Like--,

Unknown: Right.

AMH: That's what I like about Islam, is uh, the Qur'an says that God created us into tribes and nation so that we would know one another. We could all be identical. We could be like clones or something. All, everybody look exactly alike. The whole earth could have the same climate.

Unknown: Right.

AMH: Is [inaudible: 00:56:03.14]

BB: How boring that would be?

AMH: Yeah [laughs]

LP: So, yeah, it's like what, like--,

AMH: Boring, really. Um, so he did that so that we would get to know each other. We've been able to tell us, everybody, each culture has certain things that they're known for. Like, uh, some cultures are great fishermen. Some cultures are great at working metal. Some cultures are great at growing food. Some cultures are great at-at having different types of animals that they you know, animal husbandry, you know. So, then we could trade with each other. You may have some silk and I got cotton. And we're like, well, the trade--,

Unknown: Pillow.

AMH: You have chickens. I have sheep, you know? Give me some lamb chops. I'll give you those legs.

[laughter]

AMH: You know, so, uh, we're supposed to celebrate our differences. And enjoy our differences rather than, uh, hate each other because we are different. God made us different. So, there's nothing you can do about that. We're going to be different. So, um, enjoy it, you know? 'Cause it's one thing I like -- I moved, I moved to [inaudible: 00:57:21]. And the Mosque I was in were mostly people who came from the Middle East. And different regions of the country, different, all those different countries had different foods. And whenever we had potluck, oh, man. You're talking about--,

Unknown: [laughs]

AMH: I mean, you know, I was all, 'Okay, now you know where, where are you from?' You know, where, I mean I've learned so many -- I sampled so many different ways of cooking rice.

Unknown: Mm hmm.

AMH: Uh, but it was all good. You know? And I had, uh, [inaudible: 00:58:01] from everywhere. And they would just come and bring a dish that they used to eat in their country all the time when they still eat there, you know? And I had like four kind of different kinds of hummus that I never -- you can stuff, you can never make. I always thought it was just chickpeas. But you know, you can make it out of different things. I'm going, I'm going "ooh." And it was all delicious. So, uh, we need to celebrate, like you said. You could have a cultural festival. You have to include everybody.

BB: Right.

AMH: Because it wouldn't be a cultural festival if you left people out. Just because they're from a different country.

Unknown: Mm hmm.

AMH: It doesn't make s--,

LP: And what would be fine--,

AMH: Because it defeats the purpose. I mean unless you just want to have a African cultural festival.

LP: Right.

AMH: And then, you know, people come with African ancestry could celebrate their culture. And then you, maybe you could have a European cultural festival. And have all the different European cultures. And then invite people from other cultures to come to your festival and sample your food. Because then maybe they have never had any before. You know? Um, you know, this is a traditional so and so that we make in our country and you know, reach out to other groups of people and invite them. If you just want to have an African cultural festival there are so many different regions of Africa.

Unknown: Africa.

AMH: If you just wanted to celebrate the different regions or the different types of food and the different way they dress. I mean you could do that. And then reach out to Casa Az-Azatlan [Casa Azafrán], the Mexican people over there. And invite the Middle Eastern people, all of the Mosques that's here. And you know, Europeans that think -- the Jewish people, you know? Just, you know, if you're going, if you want to specialize in a particular culture, that's great, to showcase that culture. But reach out to the other cultures and invite em.

Unknown: Mm hmm. [inaudible: 01:00:18.22]

Unknown: Bye Shannon.

SF: Nice to meet you all.

AMH: Yeah, good to meet you.

SF: It's a pleasure. Pleasure meeting you.

AMH: And good luck in that inclusive discuss [inaudible: 01:00:29.21].

[Laughter]

SF: I'll see you all tomorrow, hopefully.

CL: Are we wrapping up or we still got?

Unknown: [01:00:40.09]

CL: It's time? Oh, okay.

HS: Oh, it's time?

LP: No? Where would [inaudible: 01:00:49.14]. We would get into that convo or stay or go, whatever, yeah. I know how I feel.

BB: You know, I'm, I'm going to speak again. This is Bonnie. One thing that I struggle with -- I would love your perspective is that like, from the church perspective, I feel like people are more comfortable in the traditions that they have like been trained up in. And I don't want to challenge people to feel like bad about that. And to feel like they have to step outside of that in order to be--,

Unknown: Open.

BB: To not perceive themselves as racist. Like, so I think it's important to not just en-entirely be in that environment. But like, for instance, when we worship at the AME church sometimes, um, we get some feedback from some older members that they feel like we're trying to throw our weight around a little bit or something. So, I mean I'm just talking about coming in and sitting in the back of the church.

LP: Uh huh.

BB: And worshiping, like not speaking or anything.

Unknown: Yeah.

BB: But just kind of like, because of their histories, their personal histories, they, they, they feel kind of threatened--,

Unknown: Mm hmm.

BB: Because they're like 'what does this mean? Does this mean that they're going to try to come in and take over some things or change how we've been doing things.' And we're just like: 'No, because we worship in this building we want to know you too and so--,' [Laughs]. Like, 'but please, just, you know, we'll follow, like whatever you do.' So, you know we have wine in our service. And you have grape juice. And that's okay, so, we're good.

Unknown: [01:02:26.22]

[laughter]

BB: And when like we do joint services, it depends on who's leading. So, you know, if my priest is leading then we have wine and he says, 'You know what? You don't have to even have the wine and it still means the same thing.' You know? So, it's like it's respectful of everybody's um, traditions. But, it's just something that I struggle with. Like is it okay to feel like people um -- and I don't, and I'm talking about white people here, necessarily. But like, um, if our African American neighbors in the church just want to worship in the way that's more comfortable for them because they're surrounded by people who have the same, um, culture, methods, you know, just like there's there's a way of preaching or you know, uh, like a call and response for instance. You know, so like when my priest spoke for the Interdenominational Ministers Fellowship in North Nashville on Ash Wednesday he was like -- it was different because you know, it's like 'Call out Amen.' And I'm like, 'was it, like were you able to go cause you're not used to

that?' And he was like, 'Oh, yeah.' And I was like, 'Was it exciting? Like, you know, did it encourage you?'

[Laughter]

BB: Like is there something that you can gain from that? Like it was unfamiliar to you but like could you see like what the motivation behind that is?

AMH: Yeah.

BB: But, did it make you feel more in the spirit to experience that? But, you know, like if they came to our church and feel like they can't fully worship, then I don't, I don't want them to feel like that's something they--,

LP: Yeah.

BB: That they have to do. And that's okay. Or, you know, maybe we just try to like enter into each other's spaces and know that like, I don't know.

LP: Yeah, no I had this exp--,

BB: It's really hard for me because I want people to feel like not limited in their ability to worship by any, any of those dynamics.

AMH: Yeah, it's, like you said, it's just what they're used to and things -- people, some people resist change. Some people embrace change. I embrace change. I like to. But, I mean to me it's like, 'Oh, something new? Okay. Let's see what it is, you know?'

[Laughter]

HS: Instead of something new. Oh, have you seen, anybody seen *The Groods* [*The Croods*]? It's a cartoon movie.

Unknown: Uh uh.

AMH: *The Groods* [*The Croods*]? It's about cavemen. It's a cartoon.

LP: Oh, *The Gro*—Okay, I know who you're talking about. I haven't seen it but I know--,

AMH: Oh, you need to see it.

[Laughter]

AMH: You need to see it. That's that mentality that some people have. Everything new or different is bad.

BB: Right.

AMH: So, and they had to learn the hard way. Everything was not that. You know, and it was -- you need to watch the movie, It, it's fun. It's really funny. *The Groods*, G-R-O-O-D-S, I think it is [*The Croods*].

BB: Okay.

AMH: Uh, it's probably on Netflix or Xfinity or one of the--, or you may, when you're out and Redbox or something. It came out a couple years ago. And we bought it. And it's, it's hilarious. Everything that was new or different was bad. You know, that was their father. He was trying to instill in his children not to do anything different or new.

Unknown: Right.

AMH: Because you could die, you know?

LP: I think it's like--, I think it's like gradient exposure, like over time or like in specific setting. Like I think, one, we have to talk about the fact that religion is not separate from race. And that religion has a history along with race.

Unknown: Sure.

AMH: Yes, history--.

LP: Um, because I had to -- I was raised Christian. My mom was a minister and my dad was a Deacon. And I had to go through my own personal life, like, you know, reflection with Christianity that like Christianity was kind of put to African countries as a tool of colonization. How do I feel about being Christian?

AMH: Yeah, yeah.

LP: I had to work on it.

[Applause in the room]

LP: How do [inaudible: 01:06:40.04] 'cause this is the part were we like—earlier, we were like—

[child says "Bye"] [Awws]

LP: [inaudible: 01:06:45.07] Um, so I think that. Um. Oh, they said they gon' come and pick it up I guess. If [inaudible: 01:06:54.11] just wherever we stop. Wherever stop. Um, so I think, I had to go through my own personal walk with that. It was like how do I feel about this? And, so like Christianity, well, religion, period, and race is a thing. And I think we don't have the conversation often enough in the church. Um, to what you're asking, I had this very particular experience, right? So, when I was in Western Massachusetts -- you know the story of Jesus in the wilderness? I felt like this is my wilderness. And I was like, 'okay, Lord, I'm here.' Um, so I went through -- so I grew up Christian, right and I did the service here. It's the Episcopal Service Corps. Um, and I was at an Episcopal Church that was run by, uh, a white lesbian couple.

BB: What town was it in?

LP: Hm?

BB: What town was it in?

LP: Uh, in uh, South Hadley, Massachusetts. Um, and I didn't know that the Episcopal church was a very different type of Christianity, so like I came in thinking, okay, it's Christian, cool. You know, I know that. And then like we had the hymn book and we like stood for certain parts of the ceremony and then we sat. And then, like it was just very different. And so, even I came in and was like: 'okay, cool. like, okay, the hymn book. Okay, turn the page. Okay, I don't know how to sing the song.' And I like, okay, I go up to the front. I bend down. I get the, I get the, uh, communion like there, like there was so much learning that took place for me that I, that I found I like change. So I thought it was interesting. I was like, okay, this is you know, a different side of Christianity I've never experienced before. Kind of Catholic-ish almost. Okay, cool. Um, but within that experience—

[Announcement]: Okay before you all get too involved with food and the drinks, we would like to have a picture of all of you. Um, so I'm gonna ask you go outside out there—

END OF RECORDING

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