



Library podcast

PechaKucha Seattle: Interrupting Whiteness - Part 1

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[00:00:35] This podcast is being presented in two parts. You are listening to part 1.

[00:00:41] Hello everybody. It's so nice to see you all here. I just want to say good evening and I want to start off by saying I've been carrying out around these blue notes all night and I just lost them last minute. So. So good evening welcome to tonight's program interrupting whiteness presented with our library partners Potok across Seattle. KUOW and the Seattle Office of Civil Rights. Let's hear a round of applause for the

[00:01:21] My name is Orlando Lugo and I work here at The Seattle Public Library and part of the community engagement team that helps put these programs together. Today's program is made possible by The Seattle Public Library Foundation. If we have any donors present I'd like you guys to stand up if that's the case because I'd like

[00:01:43] So yeah yeah.

[00:01:53] Our next speaker will be Native American artists and storyteller Roger Fernandes of the Lower Elwha Sklar Lam slalom. Thank you and the director of Office of Civil Rights. She will be offering opening remarks for our program tonight. So thanks a lot guys.

[00:02:21] Since the in Australia.

[00:02:25] Thank you good people for inviting me to this event. I just saw Peter Garrett and Midnight Oil and he had the mike up here so I'm not that tall yet. All right. I'm very happy to be here tonight. The topic you're going to be discussing tonight here about tonight. Consider tonight is very important and you are here to try to change something. You're here to try to change the condition that exists now or racism we imagine was gone but it's still here. And Native people have always looked at this as a very interesting interpretation of how people are to be measured by the color of their skin when I

do work with people I ask them a question and I will ask you the same question complete the following statement.

[00:03:11] The only good Indian is a dead Indian. And the question becomes.

[00:03:15] I know none of you believe that but somewhere deep inside you that story was planted I believe as part of the American psyche. And so the worker here today is not going to be just purely intellectual work talking about laws and policy in history it's going to be spiritual work that will allow spirits to combine with each other the voices to come together by spirits. So I'm going to sing to you called a change your song. It's a song that acknowledges a being who came to the world and prepared it for human beings. There was a time when there were new humans of the world but they were to come. They were foretold and someone came to the world and got the world ready for them. He has many names one is Duke Auerbach. One is stonewall for whom the Snoqualmie people are named. Another one is liberty. Another one is hall many many names but he he's called the changer by the native people because he changed the world and got the world ready for us. So I'm going to sing this song because you by being here are changes you want to change the world. So in future generations that shadow of racism will be disappearing. It will diminish our children and great grandchildren and children after them will look at is history because they'll find a way to live in the world in a better way because we have created that work.

[00:04:24] So this call called Change Your song written by my teacher Bruce Miller will you be able Woo hoo hoo.

[00:05:03] Woo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo. Woo hoo hoo hoo

[00:05:15] Hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo.

[00:05:19] Again that song with some to honor the work that you're doing. That song comes from my heart to your heart. That song is meant to begin the conversation not here because Western culture prefers to work up here and I understand that I was raised in this culture but the native people say we must start here Miss start with our heart and speak to each other from our heart and then our brain our words will come in to help us do that work. So I don't mean to lecture you in this way that I know better than you I don't. The struggle that you were in to confront racism has gone on for hundreds of years but how do we end that. And in my knowledge experience what I was taught is that the people who created it must deal with it. The people of color we've suffered under it and we have a vested interest in seeing it end. But the people who most do the work are the ones who created it. And I know you did not sit down and create this thing but the culture you live within. They created it. The idea of race being a measure of people in their work. And so I'm going to ask the people of color respect this idea that the White people must they must address this thing.

[00:06:23] They must look towards how do we end this thing. One measure I have is who are the great anti-racist civil rights leaders among the white people. And usually we can't think of anyone we might find someone that maybe a few people know but who is the person that they look to for

leadership. What man or woman do they say this is the one who speaks for us but again that's my opinion and that's why I'm up here. No. I do want to share very quickly a story that is so call me people tell. I hope this story will give us a crack in the door that we might open that door and have more open conversations more honest conversations. Storytelling is meant to help us in our heart make sense of things because oftentimes when you hear an old story our brain says well that could never happen. These things Raven cannot turn into a tree leaf and so but the stories we're not told speak to us here. They were to speak to us here so I'm going to tell you a very quick story from the Stokely booth people the Snoqualmie people a long time ago the world was very different than it is today can all of you show me.

[00:07:34] Whereas the sky whereas the sky I knew this was a good audience. Very good. All right. Yes. And how high is the sky. Well it always it wasn't always up there in this story was dark and heavy and was way down here. This is where the sky was right here and because of that the people had to walk around like this all the time they walked around all bent over because the sky was so low upon them and they they couldn't stand up. They would bump their heads and so they walked bent over all the time and because of this they kept bumping their head. Their backs began to hurt and they could not see where they were going. They could only see their feet beneath them. And so this dark and heavy sky weighed heavily upon the people. The people decided they needed an answer to this problem of the sky being right here and they went to an old man in the village needy people recognize we go to our elders because they're not just smart they're also wise. They've lived a long time. They know how to solve these big problems. So they went to this elder and he said I will think about it. I will think about it. And they came back in a couple days and he said we will push up the sky invite all the tribes here to come to our place and we will push up the sky together.

[00:08:44] And so everyone all the tribes around here were invited to this Army village up in the mountains. The plan was explained how we're going to push up the sky. And everyone agreed it was a good idea but someone way in the back called up. But there's a big problem here. We all speak different languages here. And it's true we do all the tribes here speak different languages so we all have a different word for push. How can we work together how can we push together. We all speak different languages. The elder again thought for several days and said You shall use the word ja how you help women work together you help women push together. When I say how we all say how and push up on that heavy sky. And so I want you all to participate. Audience participation it's relatively painless. All right. Put your hands right here. And when I say a How I want you all to say how. And push up on that heavy sky. We're going to push it out of our way. So here we go.

[00:09:38] Ya hope ya hope ya. Hope is that high enough.

[00:09:48] No it's not. Let's get some big long poles and keep pushing up those poles using the same words. Here we go.

[00:09:53] Yeah. Ho ho. Yeah. Ho.

[00:10:00] We did it. We pushed this guy up to where it is today. There's no call me people say if we work together we can do great things. We can even push up the sky. I tell that story oftentimes when people ask me how can we get to work together. I'm going to do something as a storyteller. I'm not supposed to do which is give you some interpretations of some of the teachings within the story. Native people call these stories the teachings and so within this story or teachings a philosophy of values of morals and beliefs within them are very very deeply planted in this story. If you know this story in your heart then you will understand some of these things. Someone in one of the story groups telling in a group like this someone raised their hand and said that word you how was crucial in his estimation that we were all different people different ages different generations different genders different class different everything. We must find one thing that unites us. That is the one thing we recognize we will all work towards because everything else might be different but we agree to accomplish this task the impossible. We must agree on one principle that we all will will carry with us and no matter what our differences we always come back to that one thing.

[00:11:12] It will allow us to work together because saying we will work together is relatively easy to actually work together is hard work. So again I want to say that as native people we look at this and say how can we help in this endeavor. We tell our stories. We try to remind you of our connection to the earth. Your connection to the earth. We try to remind you of all these things and ensuring this story I'm hoping I give you a sense of that idea of the word that doesn't seem to carry much weight anymore in this culture. It's called wisdom wisdom and that might be part of this conversation. What is the wisdom that we need to bring to this effort to deal with racism as it continued to exist in America today. So again I sang that song for you in the beginning. That song was a prayer as much as a way of honoring you. We are and on the land of the ops people do Amish people and you know their history you know that before and after the treaties they were forcibly moved from Seattle by gunpoint their villages were burned they were sent to places like Michael cute where many of them are now Tulalip Suquamish reservation.

[00:12:16] But their spirit is still here in this land see art the art who we call Seattle for whom the city is named after he prophesies our people would never leave. We would always be here so because we are still here we want to be a voice in all of this worked at being done. So this gesture among our people this gesture you see our people doing this all the time means thank you. It means hello. You're welcome. Goodbye. We do it all the time we call it putting our hands to people put it my hands to you all here today you could be doing something else something important in your life but you determined that this work is so important you must be here tonight you're sacrificing your time to be here you're sacrificing your you're sacrificing to be here tonight I understand that so many ways so I put my hands up to you all and say Huntington see if there's a way I can help you with this work I will be here. Courtney and thank you. Thank you very much.

[00:13:23] Good evening. My name is Patricia Lawley and I'm the director at the Seattle Office for Civil Rights and seeing all of you here tonight gives me hope and it's something that we are greatly in need of. I'm glad that you're here willing to have a conversation about interrupting whiteness. One of the city's overarching vision for the race and social justice initiative is that we dismantle institutional and structural racism and achieve racial equity and to do that we bring people together people of all

racism because we cannot do this work alone. And I'm excited to know that the Seattle Public Library is deepening its efforts to bring community together to have meaningful conversations about racism in America and particularly in Seattle tonight's conversation is a bit controversial because it flips the script and it asks White people to weigh in on racism. And it asks White people to make clear their anti-racist commitment. Now I'm sure that when the organizers prepared for this event that they'd never imagined the horrible loss of life that occurred just a few days ago in Portland.

[00:14:44] That juxtaposition of hope and despair makes this conversation all the more critical. The reality is we cannot live without it. Please join me in a moment of silence for Richard Collins. And Ricky John best and Taylor Sean Meriden Nam Chi Mich of Portland. We mourn them and all who have died because of our culture of racial hatred. After the killings in Portland my Portland counterpart wrote an editorial and he said this The reality is is that people of color experience racism and harassment every day in Portland. We fear for our children and ourselves because the current political and social climate has emboldened bigots and white supremacists to be more comfortable more public and aggressive with their hate. We are frustrated and disgusted when folks are surprised that such overt racism and hatred could exist in progressive Portland Oregon. I hope you are here tonight because you want to prevent such atrocities from happening in progressive Seattle but I'm hoping for more than that. I'm hoping that you will do your part in changing the reality of the school to prison pipeline of over incarceration of gentrification and displacement environmental racism and lack of opportunity for our black and brown community members from cradle to grave Equity and Inclusion help us to create communities of belonging it provides for a future that is beautifully united in our race and social justice trainings in the city. There is and we never expect closure please don't expect closure tonight. It has taken over 500 years a building white supremacy to have the American institution that it is today.

[00:17:21] And this two and a half hours together in contrast is an imperfect and short beginning let's be honest. Failure is an option. It's a possibility. A white LED conversation about undoing racism is a fraught endeavor but one that also has the possibility to galvanize the forces of love to heal and to have a deeper understanding of one another and that is to say that our white that when our white brothers and sisters this evening take the mike they do so already aware that they cannot supplant or replace the voices of people of color. Nor can they ever know our experience of racism instead. Their job is to do something beautiful and modest to begin the necessary work of accountability to have the humility and honor to try and fail and to try again. As white allies. Just as people of color day after day deal with and endure the discomfort and hurt of racism I think all of you in advance for holding a space of love a space of caring a beginning to imagine what it would look like to create a community of belonging where we are all within the circle of human concern I can assure you that at the Office for Civil Rights we look forward to and we are eager to work with you to make a difference in our great city. Thank you. How's everybody feeling

[00:19:25] You all are beautiful crowd.

[00:19:27] Give yourselves a round of applause.

[00:19:33] My name is DeVita Ingram and I'm the public engagement programs manager at the library and I'm delighted I want to bring them in closer to share the stage with Caroline and honor. We are also short for time so we're going to try and pick up some time with our remarks and get ready for our next speaker.

[00:19:50] So you want to take it away on a thank you all for being here it's really really incredible to see everybody coming together here today. When I founded Pawtucket eleven years ago this was the dream that in coming together to celebrate that we would have the capacity to deepen our commitment to each other and have conversations like this one in which we are vulnerable and exposed and ready to grow and I can see that this is the community that is in fact so primed for this work. As we prepared for the for tonight we've been listening to feedback. People of color and white people share their concerns about if it would work to have white folks engage their communities around racism. Others have said Finally it's time we're here to hold our plural perspectives because libraries public libraries and pitchfork which are our democratic spaces Choctaw is a format that allows for perspective taking speakers have 20 slides and 20 seconds to slide. No matter who you are we have 11 different Pataki which has speakers tonight and Mitchell remarks by social media genius and such a luminary Aegean solo and poet Karlyn Newhouse. A recent I know let's give it up for both of them. Karlyn Newhouse is a recent finalist for youth poet laureate.

[00:21:26] Can we have a round of applause for Roger and for Patty.

[00:21:30] I kind of thought of a better way.

[00:21:40] I could have thought of a better way to start the night. And I also just wanted to give some context that I have I'm proud to be able to work with honor on a number of different protocols that look at racial violence the first time I got a chance to work with her was directly after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson Missouri. We came together again at Mt. Zion to talk about the killings of unarmed black people and most recently at the library as we've been doing programming about our changing political climate in America. We did American visionaries that looked at a program that looked at anti-immigrant sentiment and xenophobia particularly the ways that Latino Muslim and other immigrant communities of color are being affected. This is our first time that we are doing community engagement directly with white people to have conversations with their own community members around challenging anti-racism.

[00:22:38] We invite folks to do perspective taking around power and privilege in this room today. And when you go home to your loved ones because anti-racist work is everyone's work. We're also beginning this conversation realistically without a guarantee it will succeed. How do is right that failure. Failure is an option and that beginnings can be human imperfect and helpful in their own right. Seattle is over 70 percent white and we believe that in order for our city to be equitable and inclusive. White people have to be active in the fight to challenge white supremacy by working in concert with communities of color.

[00:23:21] That was quite a lead of you still there. All right. I like participatory clouds. Our next speaker is Jed Muir. A lecturer in American and ethnic studies and Cultural Studies at the University of Washington Bothell. Jed teaches rights and partners with students artists scholars and organizers to engage race and racism intersectionality cultural movements and social change. His current project focuses on black radical art and politics in the Pacific Northwest. Please welcome Jeremiah

[00:24:04] Hello. This is seven frames DaVita. By way of Aretha I ask you to participate. You tell her that two of the things that make you most uncomfortable are white people applauding themselves for anti-racist work and anytime a white person speaks at a Q and A you Google interrupting whiteness and two of the first four results are racist screeds against public school teachers getting together to address the way that white supremacist ideology shapes shapes educational environments and policies and act which these commentators deem shockingly racist to whiteness begins through a consensual and solidarity sense of a besieged people establishing its identity through its own generalization and oppression of those it sees as a threat or as black studies scholar and poet Fred Moten puts it.

[00:24:54] Settlers always think they're defending themselves. That's why they build forts on other people's land and then they freak out over the fact that they're surrounded. In this sense there is no such thing as a neutral white identity since whiteness is weaponized against perceived threats internal and external a fact which goes some way toward explaining the marriage of whiteness nationalism property and propriety throughout the history of the settler colony of the United States.

[00:25:22] 3 It is an ironic effect of so much collective insurgency against white supremacy hetero patriarchy colonialism and what the great Cedric Robinson called racial capitalism that for so many white people anti-racism means confessing one's privilege. Though such insurgencies for marriage large to Black Lives Matter have never been about individual subjects or an individualist notion of liberation as so many feminists of color have pointed out white people in schools activist spaces non-profits etc. tend to perform or deny our privilege as individuals. This points to a deeper problem. Privileged discourse often assumes that white people have something that other people should want. Bell hooks his mom understood this problem when she told her daughter she could take what white people have to offer but she didn't have to love them and hooks knew that what her mother meant was she wouldn't adopt she shouldn't adopt their ways and institutions and practices at the expense of the ways of knowing and being hoaxed carried with her.

[00:26:25] The rich radical forms of knowledge and collective social life produced at the margins for less than a week before the event you get in a car accident. The damage is bad the airbag hurts but you're fine. The white police officer a.k.a. the police officer on scene ask you no questions and not supposed to let you drive home with a deployed airbag. He hands you his four inch knife knife to cut it off yourself. Don't cut me with my own knife he jokes. Five individuated violence of whiteness including the commitment to the idea that you can own yourself and therefore grasp and know and own the world might be thought of as an imposition against seeing other ways of being in the world ways of being most often embodied and lived by whiteness as hated others the poor the black the immigrant the indigenous. The unsettled to the extent to which we invest in a vast web of social

relations and imaginary is that produce life chances for some and premature death for others. We fail to engage in the collective work. Adrienne Rich referred to as recognizing whiteness as a point of location for which we must take responsibility. This is what one scholar has called the possessive investment in whiteness. Toni Morrison one of the keenest theories of this possessive investment captures in one paragraph how it destroys possibilities for solidarity sociality and collective being.

[00:27:50] When she describes how Irish immigrants attempt to enter whiteness by participating in gendered anti black racism 6 in Citizen An American Lyric Claudia Rankin chooses to remove the person who was lynched from a lynching photograph. She secured from state archives rather than continuing to spectacular eyes black pain and death. She directs us to the people who believe themselves to be white in the foreground of the image people who circulate their acts across the vast white network through newspapers letters postcards holiday greetings and even auto audio recordings featured publicly in sites like Seattle's Pike Place Market while your students recognize that citizen is about micro aggressions anti black violence and liberal racism. They also point to all the other things that happen amidst and underneath this violence like the moment on the subway when a white man runs over a little boy of color and doesn't see him has never seen him and doesn't stop to attempt reparation. The mother of the boy says the beautiful thing is that a group of men began to stand behind me like newly found uncles and brothers 7 in this period of racial capitalism. Your job involves spending most days figuring out how to get together and move and think with students who are told directly and indirectly that they must reproduce the university by producing themselves at certain kinds of people with certain kinds of stories.

[00:29:22] Stories that might get them labeled excellent and employable and get their pictures on the diversity Web site or on the side of a city bus. But they keep fucking up. Flipping the Script messing with racialized gender norms finding new stories to tell and not tell asking too many questions demanding and refusing insisting we talk more about words like hegemony and intersectionality and liberation. Thinking a little too critically about basketball and Bollywood embodying something other than the best docile flexible subjects of neo liberalism. Finding ways to strategize to live and be together otherwise as Sean Crowley might say to twist their heads up together the rich radical ongoing histories and resources that animate their ground. And this one encouraged us to twist up our heads together and strategize and militate toward dismantling whiteness and its inseparable relationship to racial capitalism from small acts of insurgency like walking so slowly at the back of a black lives matter march for hours continually causing a bike gang of police officers to fall over to large collective projects of non reformist reform as abolitionists like ruthless and Wilson Gilmore and every Gordon call it aimed at remaking the arrangements of power property and propriety that produced life chances for some and premature death for everyone else and for the earth.

[00:30:48] Thank you thank you so much Chad.

[00:31:02] Thank you.

[00:31:04] Thank you. I'm going to say thank you Richard one more time. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. Our next speaker is Ashley Harrison. Ashley has worked at the Seattle Public Library

for eight years before recently joining the city of Seattle legislative department where she provides operational support for the legislative process. She is a lifelong Washingtonian. Let us give a warm welcome to Ashley Harrison.

[00:31:41] Good evening. I want to say one thing before I start I'm probably going to speak very quickly. I'm nervous and there are a lot of you here. It's lovely to see all your faces and 20 seconds is not a lot.

[00:31:52] So please bear with me for the speed run thank you What do I do to kick this off Seattle's majority.

[00:32:02] Whiteness is not happenstance. This whiteness was designed to violently. This is from a list of four hundred and sixteen racial restrictive housing covenants in King County subdivisions and entire neighborhoods wrote restrictions into their deeds specifying that homes could only be sold or rented to white people and the restrictions weren't outlawed until the 1968 Fair Housing Act federally the Chinese Exclusion Act was in effect from 1882 to 1943 prohibiting emigration by Chinese laborers who had been coming to the west coast and in 1942 nearly 13000 people of Japanese descent were subjected to forced internment and dispossessed of their lands and assets Mauritius lagged behind white settlers pinned down the dual long houses to push out the original inhabitants of this land and all of this is central to our current conversations around race access and housing who was able to gain a foothold. And how did that shape our city today. So this is the famous starting assumption that race is a social construct but we almost reckon with the real and significant harm inflicted on the basis of race. So how can white people disrupt white cultural norms when we also share traits like perfectionism worship of the written word and allowing a sense of urgency to win out over other considerations. And I want to credit Ken the Jones and Timo Coon that that list comes from an excerpt of an article searching from their book.

[00:33:25] So how do we push back when the structure of our very organizations mirrors white culture. So here's something that doesn't work. Early in my career in new to working in large institutions I was concerned about a process with disproportional negative access. A negative impact on people of color. I knew the people in charge of that process and went to them individually thinking they would take this up once I laid out the evidence. But this did not work. The one on one approach the sincerity without political pressure did nothing to inspire an examination of the issue. Moving a large institution takes more than sincerity and facts engaging one on one or in small groups is an extremely important tool. Conversation can be transformative. Talk to your friends and relatives about race and normalize these conversations between white people. But when there's a big power differential between you and the person you're appealing to. You need a larger forum so this is what I look for now who shares this concern. Who holds relationships with impacted people so we can get feedback and be accountable. Who are the partners and co signers and what are the pressure points. If you want to dismantle vertical power you have to build horizontal power public employees are also represented by unions at a much higher rate than the private sector. And I was active in the union here at SPL.

[00:34:43] Unions can have a positive effect on wages of diverse groups of employees but have an uneven track record around racial equity in their internal leadership and impact Seattle school. For example Seattle's public school teachers demanded changes to a disciplinary structure to improve student racial equity outcomes and cited that when they went out on strike but many police unions have chosen to support biased violent officers by contesting discipline rather than support accountability to the communities they serve. Sometimes even problematic structures offer tools for addressing a specific inequity or offer to opportunities to be a buffer. So as a union steward I worked cases on behalf of individuals and when I represented employees of color we sometimes decided together that I would go alone into the formal meetings so the employee could spend their time and energy where they wanted rather than retelling emotionally draining stories to what decision makers who were focused on what's documented and easily quantifiable but in that same union context. We did not look at racial equity in our leadership or engage specifically with staff of color to represent their interests. If you only serve the people who engage you you will chronically underserved many communities. When I first heard this prompt all I could think of were questions and some I routinely ask myself. Others I struggled to engage with.

[00:35:58] What I see as vital to revisit on an ongoing basis as Who were your influences artistically politically literarily and musically in whatever media you most consumer create. Think about what you take in and then think about whether most of those creators and producers and people depicted are white. A second question there are you ever not the intended audience. If you don't seek works where you weren't a primary consideration everything is being softened for you. This doesn't mean that you have access to every space that's a harmful notion but you can learn from books articles and interviews without asking people of color to take more of their time to educate you. When I think about what holds me back from deeper engagement one thing stands out after final presentations in a college class my professor George remarked that our mostly white cohort struggled with allowing others even a glimpse into our internal worlds. It's common is stuck with me ever since. I think that this is white fragility of only letting out the parts of ourselves that match up to these unspoken expectations of whiteness. And this is what white people gain by working to dismantle structural racism because you cannot engage on someone else's behalf as disingenuous and ineffective. But by redistributing power and resources by amplifying voices telling truths outside of and beyond our conventional wisdom we will have the opportunity to become someone other than the selves prescribed and constrained by whiteness.

[00:37:19] When it comes to processing whiteness my instinct is to stew on this until I can present something fully formed. This isn't something I've adopted consciously but it takes away accountability and knowledge sharing and deprives me of opportunities to fail and do better. It stopped me from contributing because the way that I see it I don't have anything to contribute yet. But you can't be stuck in that state in perpetuity. An earlier slide because I'm behind is Athena Greek goddess of wisdom bursting fully formed from zeus his head and I just wanted to say most things don't burst fully formed from your head especially not with them. So I think that this instinct comes from a weird sense that the work is somehow always out of reach. This notion that it's always an external amorphous thing that I can't quite get to. Instead of just seeking better practices for being in the world and more open and less harmful ways so white people have to talk to other folks about racism so it becomes an

embedded practice for us to consider questions of equity representation and access throughout our lives. This is a conversation that relies on some shared vocabulary. It may seem strange to seek out other white people as an anti-racist resources but whose job is it to interrupt whiteness.

[00:38:31] It's ours of two local groups of white people organizing each other and taking leadership from people of color. One is the coalition of anti-racist whites and the second is European descent and these groups embed accountability into their structure so it's not just white people talking to each other about social social justice to distance ourselves from quote those other white people. I think coming into anti-racist work white people misunderstand what's expected of us and make it out to be bigger but we don't have the solutions. If you mystify the work is something other than daily practice it will remain difficult to engage with. So find something concrete and practical to do. It doesn't have to be glamorous it's probably better if it's behind the scenes helping to amplify voices or shine a light. So what's expected. Learn history. Show what. Take leadership from people of color. Be prepared to risk your comfort your reputation and your physical safety. We're seeing an outright legislative and often physical assault on communities of color immigrants and poor folks so always amplify the voices of people most affected by an issue electing campaign for people of color and cede space and airtime. Instead of taking it jump in now. If you're not doing this already it's here it's now and we need to work together to transform this moment into one of solidarity and hope.

[00:39:50] Thank you.

[00:40:07] Our next speaker is Emily Potts is a visual artist musician writer and curator based here in Seattle.

[00:40:14] Please welcome her to the stage.

[00:40:26] I like what was said earlier about it being OK to fail. My story is about something that happened here in Seattle in the art community that I'm part of. And believe it or not it was there was some pretty we'll see the story about Seattle. So I do want to say it's an honor to be here. But I'm also suspicious of the idea that I can interrupt my own whiteness. Am I just pouring more whiteness into whiteness. I also noticed on the Facebook page a lot quite a bit of conversation including the question of what it means to for a choco child to be a trademarked Japanese term owned by Westerners. So I said I'd mention that here are some famous artists. They're all white men. So the white male dominated history you learn in school teach like not only are these the important people but this also influences the standards of what's considered beautiful what is collected by museums. Meanwhile the sort of history of the museum is that they were literally invented to house trophies looted from conquered people. So when we're talking about storytelling and spaces and art spaces there is quite a bit that you can do or not do to control how the narrative works. There's also white supremacy in the way art gets funded whether it's subject to capitalist market or funded by philanthropy where billionaires who've gotten rich through capitalism are in the position to decide who deserves money or the fact that in order to get grants you have to fill out paperwork demonstrating how responsible you will be with your money and that the perception of responsibility often depends directly on who you are and your connection within that system.

[00:42:06] So I'm going to tell you a story about something that happened that I was sort of part of and that I am trying to I was asked what work I'm doing personally and this is the work I'm doing personally. So last fall I was approached by Molly Mack who's a really amazing curator at this gallery called the Alice gallery in Georgetown. She asked me to co curate a sound show called Listen it's a sound show. So Molly is an anti-racist antifascist organizer and she was really interested in tying in sound art with activism like asking the question who are what do we listen to and why. So she wanted to host things like spoken word and comedy and a momentary meager which is an oral history project based in Portland. About the impact of immigration on breastfeeding mothers or India will Koma a Seattle artist who has a current exhibition at Northwest African-American museum. Thinking about gentrification and displacement and his life is next. And I'm like Yeah of course this is an amazing idea.

[00:43:01] I'm so into this. So our exhibition was going to be part of a larger festival which had funding from a for culture tech specific grant and Molly was also helping to curate several other shows for the same festival. This was back in September we put together this whole show we were very excited about it. Then about a week before our show was supposed to open there was this opening night launch party organized around the theme of erasure by some out of town curators but affiliated with the same festival we were of the 40 artists. Two of the more black. Their names are Julissa Trapp and Christopher Paul Jordan. They were working on a project which was a multimedia installation in their words about the need to refute evidence and artifacts of blackness. Their product included two hour winos two laptops or projector. It was highly technological and very very obviously a highly fragile. So a few hours before the opening some of the organizers decided they needed to move the installation. But the artists weren't there. Instead of calling them on their phones they moved the installation without the artist's permission and broke it literally resulting in the erasure of a work about the erasure of artifacts of blackness. In an event called erasure in which they were the only two black artists

[00:44:18] So I wasn't at this event neither was Molly but as soon as it happened we started seeing all this discussion on Facebook and as organizers of an affiliated event. We were like holy shit what do we do. Well what does an apology look like for us while we're like We need to get an apology out there. What does it look like. Five Rules for apologizing. Grown up on behind you can't put yourself in anybody else's shoes so you apologize not sorry you got offended but I'm sorry for what I did. These rules were written by each Yoma who's here. If you're sorry how do you do better next time. No buts don't equivocate. No. This was put together by someone else like this. Your name is on this page you're responsible for a apology and remember that forgiveness isn't part of the deal. This isn't for your ego to feel less guilt. This is for the person who experienced harm to hear you say that you see them as a fellow human being worthy an apology. We told this to the person who is organizing the festival. This was our response is the natural photograph of her email to us. And she didn't understand why it was her job to apologize. And so when she finally issued a statement it was a non apology about explaining went wrong from their perspective and minimizing her personal role in the whole thing. And at this point you might notice that I haven't mentioned the name of the person we're talking about or the festival we were working with and it's very intentional because this whole time in

the behind the scenes emails there's a language being used that's very litigious and threatening the words character defamation are being used to describe angry people demanding an apology.

[00:45:41] So a week before our thing is supposed to open we're gonna email artists about the event we're like. We can't ask these artists who are telling these incredibly vulnerable stories that we want to support and do justice to to please promote this festival which in this point isn't the news for being a racist shit show. So this wasn't the only show Molly was curating at the festival so for her it was a big deal and a ton of work. She was going to get paid for it but we decided to cancel the event because we couldn't promote it in good faith and we certainly couldn't ask anyone else to. And as soon as we announced this decision we started hearing from artists and people our community going yeah those was are true but the festival organizer became very angry and called Molly unprofessional. This stung because she was working so hard and hadn't been paid anything yet. But if I think about it what is professionalism. It's a word that gets used against people often it's a demand that you keep a smile on your face while something isn't going very wrong. Or when people tell you that you're hurting them you know and you're figuring out how to use PR to spin it for the good of organization.

[00:46:44] Instead of saying Oh my God are you OK Sara this whole fiasco we decided to play for that same grant. Get it and host the exhibition ourselves and host this exhibition about listening in a way that made it feel like we were listening to the artists. If a show about you racier accidentally embodies erasure can we make our show about listening and body listening. It's a question and not a statement because I honestly do not know if two white women are actually capable of pulling ourselves out of the way enough to let the work itself be the narrative and just support what it needs instead of exercising control or imposing our own agenda. But we are in a position to get that grant and use it and institutional funding to provide a platform so that last slide was a flyer for a show which is this Saturday in Georgetown at Equinox Studios and it's free and it's paid for by a coat for culture tech specific grant and there are a lot of artists that if you're here tonight I think you'd find it extremely interesting. Have conversation about listening and what that means in the context of an art event and you're all invited to come and see how well we do at making it better than the last thing.

[00:48:06] Love in the love for Emily Paris. Our next speaker is my office mate

[00:48:14] Haytham bass.

[00:48:16] Hayden is outreach programs manager for the Seattle Public Library.

[00:48:20] She is an active member of the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition and the Seattle King County and double ACP.

[00:48:30] I'm also very honored to have her on the stage because she does really incredible work as a white ally at the library.

[00:48:36] Welcome Peyton.

[00:48:44] Good evening everyone. When DaVita invited me to be part of this event I hesitated for a lot of reasons partly because I know that at times I have failed to interrupt white supremacy sometimes because I didn't even see it. But I know that this isn't really about me. It's about recognizing my situation as a privileged person and an unjust system of power. It can be challenging for white people to see whiteness in a workplace like a public library staff work here because we believe in the mission to build community. But that doesn't mean that white supremacy doesn't persist. Now I love libraries and I love this one in particular and that's why it's necessary to be clear eyed and honest about the work we need to do. What I hope to do tonight is to highlight a few of the ways I've seen white supremacy show up and share some of the mistakes I've made and some of the ways I'm trying to do better. Together we can think about how we as white folks will make our workplaces safer for our colleagues of color and therefore a better places for everyone to work and better positioned to do good work. So what does white supremacy look like in the workplace. A hierarchy with power and whiteness concentrated at the top. It's usually unchallenged white staff point to factors that seem beyond our control. Library schools aren't graduating enough candidates of color or we're bound by Richard job descriptions or candidates of color aren't interested in working here.

[00:50:02] Hierarchy aside white staff often fail to recognize and take responsibility for our own power and spheres of influence. I'm not at the top of the hierarchy but I do have a platform and a place that decision making tables and my whiteness makes the stakes for speaking out very low ambiguity allows implicit biases to thrive murky communication protocols and undefined relationships between individuals and work teams. I mean the white staff can choose to communicate a network primarily with white colleagues staff of color missed connections and opportunities for advancement their morale sinks and the White hierarchy remains in place white folks take credit for the work and ideas of people of color. We all know this especially when it comes to racial justice work. Sometimes we don't even realize we're doing in over the last couple of years I managed a community engagement initiative here at the library. The approach came mainly through conversations with my former supervisor Erica Coover. My colleagues to keep the appeal at the design of a crucial training we rolled out to staff all over the system which continues to be foundational to our community engagement work. It wasn't my intention to race their contributions but my intentions are not the point. When I failed to act white supremacy did its work.

[00:51:20] I got most of the credit and harmed them both at SPL decisions tend to be read made and rooms full of white people and nobody questions that or maybe nobody even notices. Sometimes just one or two staff of color are expected to somehow represent the views of all people of color. We white folks have to point this out. We have to ask every time how can we make ethical decisions while practicing exclusion. Similarly race and social justice initiatives are undertaken by white staff working in isolation eliminating opportunities for staff of color. I like this cartoon by Meghan Don the toad points out that toad stories aren't being told so the cat hurries to solve the problem by appropriating toad stories. A few years ago I was on the library's social media team which at the time was all white. We wanted to do a campaign for We need diverse books. A movement led by authors of color to push for diversity in publishing. We plan the campaign without consulting any staff of color. I know my supervisor Rebecca I know now had to point this out and several co-workers including Jose Watanabe were gracious enough to consult with us on the back end. But it shouldn't have gone that

way. Sometimes whiteness is so centered that the existence of people of color is erased even when they're in the room in a conversation about cultural competency a co-worker once said well we have to recognize that we're all middle class white woman.

[00:52:38] A colleague had to point out that she was in fact not white waitstaff assume that it's never about race unless it's explicitly about race. White privilege means being able to pretend that decisions about hiring practices committee structures and communication norms can somehow be made in a colorblind vacuum when staff of color speak out they're not believed. How could such a thing happen in a place full of well-meaning white people or they are told police they're too angry or they didn't speak up soon enough. If they choose to speak with colleagues one on one they're being confrontational. If they start a dialogue on the Internet they're being indirect. I can only imagine how difficult and dangerous this labor is when white colleagues do internalized feedback. We respond with fragility interpreting any criticism around race as a personal judgment. We get angry and defensive and point out our good intentions ignoring the harm we've done and the structures that make it possible. We may even excuse ourselves from racial justice work since we're just not very good at it. So how do we stop being fragile and start fighting structural racism. White people have to have hard conversations with each other about race both inside and outside of the workplace as much as I appreciate everything I've learned from friends and colleagues of color.

[00:53:54] I realize it's not their job to teach me about my own whiteness. White people must hold each other accountable. And I especially have to be accountable to people of color building relationships. Accepting critique believing in their lived experiences. Supporting and crediting their work. I also look for opportunities to join spaces led by people of color where I can play a supportive role. I'm not talking about invading peoples these safe spaces in affinity groups but about finding ways to learn and work toward justice that aren't a burden to my friends and co-workers. For me racial justice work is mainly about building better habits. I can't do it because I want to be seen as good. I have to do it because I want to be a little more free. I'm constantly learning for my friends and colleagues of color and it would be impossible to adequately thank them for their insights and their patience. None of the ideas I've shared and share tonight came to me in isolation thanks to my co-workers Orlando Lugo and Davida Ingram for their willingness to talk with me about this. This talk and to record Coover who not only provided a ton of support for this talk but over our many years as co-workers has somehow managed to be my supervisor peer mentor and friend thanks also to CSX advocacy and policy cohort number three for helping me to continue to grow my thinking around race and especially to Amy Lou and Erin Aquino for facilitating a color brave space. I appreciate all of you being here and listening and my fellow presenters for their insights. I look forward to continuing the conversation.

[00:55:20] Thank you. Our next presenter

[00:55:37] Is someone that I know is so dear to me and to so many people in this room is is Diana Falchuk Yeah Diana is an artist facilitator organizer consultant strategist policymaker consultant and mother whose work focuses on racial and social justice. Diana's practice uses creative arts based

tactics to support anti-racism efforts in the community and through government and non-profit organizations. Let's welcome the amazing Diana Falchuk

[00:56:25] That good. Okay. Well that was different.

[00:56:27] Thank you.

[00:56:29] I just want to start by expressing gratitude for all of the people who have made it possible for me to share. Tonight the many people of color and white people who have gifted me the experience of their wisdom generosity and love for humanity. And I specifically want to thank the people of color who given me permission to share the experiences that I've had with them. I also want to give some love to honor Caroline and Davida and a little extra shout to Davida for her provocative framing for us presenters and her consistent love for this community. I know I'm going to wrestle with the whiteness within and around me for the rest of my life. I recognize the thick malaise of my own whiteness that weighs me down with anxiety isolation and the need to be in control. Liberation is a hazy compass that I try to follow. I get lost cause harm I fuck up a lot. I'm learning every day and I try to apply that learning honestly and share it with others. I came to recognize the feeling of whiteness in my body for the first time a couple of years ago as a result of the bravery of a person of color I supervised who asked to remain anonymous. In this experience she had decided to help facilitate a training for people of color led community group in a nearby city. She'd already met the limitations on how much of this kind of support that I said our team could give.

[00:57:42] I had a whole bunch of reasons for these rules that had to do with fitting the norms of the institution. I defended the reasons that I that it was what I was supposed to do I thought but in my gut I did not believe them. Mostly my reason was because I said so when I heard from a mutual friend that this person I supervise had been at the training anyway. I felt violated and confused. I told her I felt deeply disrespected and asked her to leave the training because I was now in a position to have to lie to my superiors at the institution. When we talked in person she'd only one thing to say. An unexpected gift that completely reset my path in this work and in my life. She asked me to reflect on how I caused harm to her and the community and come back to her when I had an authentic understanding of my own to share. My gut was on fire with anger and anxiety. I could barely eat or sleep. Seriously. I had to reflect my reaction felt almost automatic. I recognize that it was totally out of scale with what had happened. So I reached out to a few white friends who had an anti-racism practice and could help me make sense of my feelings and they held me in a way I am forever grateful.

[00:58:46] Being asked to reflect opened up space for me to learn how insidious white supremacy can be how it burrows in my body and every body every interaction every decision especially within our institutions. I began to put a name to that burning anxiety in my upper gut. It was my humanity battling against my internalized whiteness. The thing that tells me I'm right to believe that my comfort and comfort in the institution are more important than people of color. I began to understand how I can go deeper in the work by D centering these comforts and centering people of color so I could be part of collective change. I was still grappling when I shared my emerging awareness. A week later I'd gotten

in the way of this opportunity for her and our team to help build collective anti-racist power in our region. I was committed to struggling to building a relationship that supported her to undoing white institutional norms. I've come to understand this as a defining characteristic of whiteness. It cuts us off from the collective so we stay disembodied unwell and obedient to capitalism. Her decision to support community power over whiteness embodied collective liberation. Her request that I reflect allowed me to feel whiteness being interrupted I got to experience breaking through that transactional efficient way that had rewarded me in the past.

[01:00:05] I listened to her into my gut. I stuck around. Even though I felt hopeless and my discomfort and this allowed something deeper grounded and interconnected to emerge not long after that cracking open I was once again called away from whiteness toward embodiment through a project called Toward Love in public which was the first creative output of a group of white artists seeking to use our creative work to address whiteness toward love responded to the question What do you need to unearth release or reclaim in order to show up for true justice and liberation. This January we invited other white folks to interact with this collection of short works about ancestry assimilation and freedom from whiteness. We informally shared with various artists friends of color through the process and invited several of them to dinner in April to explore what accountability would look like if we continue the project. Shelby handler who we'll share later tonight will explain more of the many ways that these artists of color interrupted whiteness that night. But I'm going to focus on Kristen Bell and Christina or Bey who gave us the call to heal ourselves from whiteness not in the spa treatment checking white comfort kind of way and not gentrifying. Identity politics was which was wisdom that defeated Ingram shared with us that night and which we know would further just place people of color. But healing our personal humanity from white supremacy is historic wounds on our families our selves our future generations.

[01:01:28] This includes forming relationships of deep love and mutual concern that are rooted in a common vision of shared power wholeness and joy. This set our group on a new path a soulful path whiteness keeps trying to yank me out of the struggle. More and more to stay in it I'm trying to move not from guilt shame or fear but from a desire to co create a world that honors my me and my ancestors and sustains all of our children the planet and its animals world so abundant and networks of mutuality and that poverty and disease and planetary death are not entrenched inevitability is but rather events that we can overcome I'm trying to hold a vision that includes constant deep listening to people of color and building loving relationships with other white people that are accountable by telling each other the hard truths when my sons have launched through my body into this world. A year ago he turned my belly button from an any to an Audi. It reminds me that he's forever pulling me toward a world in which we both get to learn what it means to be human. Inside a white body and a racist society I pray that my loving struggle against whiteness will make him even more resistant resilient interdependent full of heart and whole. Thank you

[01:02:55] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

[01:03:13] This concludes part 1. Listen to Part 2 for the conclusion of this podcast.