

TRANSCRIPT – MARCUS MCDONALD

Interviewee: MARCUS MCDONALD

Interviewer: MILLS PENNEBAKER

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MILLS PENNEBAKER: Okay. All right. So this is Mills Pennebaker. It's April?

MARCUS MCDONALD: Sixteenth? Or seventeenth?

MP: Sixteenth, it's Saturday, 2021. Just for the purposes of the recording, could you say your name?

MM: My name is Marcus McDonald and I'm the leader of CHS BLM.

MP: Sweet. So we're not from Charleston. We both grew up in the Midlands. Do you want to tell me just some background, like, what was your childhood like? Where'd you go to school? Family, friends, who'd you run around with when you were a kid?

MM: I grew up in Columbia, near Five Points. So my--actually I was born in Silver Springs, Maryland, but I only lived there for like a couple of months and then my family moved down because my family, a lot of my family lived around Columbia. Originally we lived by my granddad's house. My granddad was a big chef, served like Barack Obama, the Clintons, the Bush--I think maybe Bush, I'm not sure. Just this really big, you know, caterer slash little country cook out in Columbia and in Charleston, because that's where he's from, and he was actually the first black manager for the Francis Marion. Yeah. So yeah, I lied to her. She was like put on me.

MP: Really! I didn't know that.

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MM: Yeah, so he has a lot of history he put on me. Yeah. And he was mad into the civil rights movement. So like a lot of that stuff passed down to me, so he's always proud of me and shit. Anyways, yeah, so I grew up in Five Points, went to a like mixed race, I guess, elementary school, like in a wealthier, neighborhood. But we had I guess pretty diverse school. And then I went to my middle school was the one I was zoned for and it was one of the worst schools in the country at one point, like maybe a couple of years before I went. It was like--I think it was like number seventeen out of the bottom twenty-five, so I was like, "Okay, well, I guess I'm just going to have to go to school," because like I said, I was zoned for it.

It was an all-Black schools, W.A. Perry. I went there--a lot of the friends who I went to school with there, I still keep in touch with. But it gave--I feel like it helped my identity a lot, because before it was like a more affluent elementary school. Then I went to the middle school, it was like, you know, pretty much a hundred percent black kids. And, um, I don't know. I just felt like I got--I was able to appreciate my identity there. Not like I didn't appreciate it, but I was around my folks all the time, and these are the people I still keep tabs with. After that I went to A.C. Flora, which was weird, because it was like in the affluent area, but they had kids from the projects near my house who went there. So it was like really rich-ass kids and then fucking people from like the--their neighborhood actually was on gangland. About like, I think 2012--they're like real motherfuckers, but anyways--and now they tore down.

MP: So just really different elementary, middle, high school.

MM: Yeah, exactly. Just like, I guess kind of like figuring it out. One of my best friends, Naheem who I went to the same middle school with--I guess it's a supporting story, but anyways, I guess it'll kind of get into--I wasn't really activated, but it was my first kind of negative experience. It kinda shows you how I was when I was younger. One of my best friends, mind

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you, we were outside the Waffle House, you know, the one in Five Points, and it was like when it first came out. So we went there all the time.

MP: One of the best places.

MM: Yeah, exactly. My friend's grandma gave us some money to go out there so we were walking, I guess we were waiting on one of our friends who went to the corner store and we were waiting on him to come back. While we were waiting, we were just posted up on the corner--I bet it was like five minutes--but like, I guess it was probably three police cars pulled up on us and they're like, dah-dah-dah-dah, you know, ask for ID and stuff. And we were like, mind you, I was like fourteen, fifteen, so I had my driver's permit. So I was like, "Yeah, I have a permit, I'm only like fourteen." They searched us. They made us take off our shoes and stuff. And they're like, "Yeah, y'all are from up there." We were like, "Yeah, we live up there." "Y'all know where y'all from. Y'all wearing those colors." And I was like, "N----, this isn't even a Crip neighborhood," but anyways, we were wearing blue. But I was like, well one, you criminalize us--we're like thirteen, fourteen--and it didn't really like hit me then, but when I look back and I was, "Damn," you know? They're like, "Oh, y'all are from there, like up there," because he saw my dress. But that's how other people would just view the upbringing. So I don't know. But yeah, so after that, living in Columbia and then I went to college. So that was kinda like childhood.

Childhood stories.

MP: Yeah. Yeah. Your grandfather though, was that your mom's side or dad's side?

MM: My mom's side.

MP: Your mom's side, that's what I thought. And he was from Charleston. So did you have other family down here?

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MM: Yeah, my auntie lives right by Burke, so on the Westside, and then I have some family in like the Neck area that I don't see that often, but they're still up there. I have some family out--my cousin lives out in the Goose Creek area. I got some families, you know, sprinkled around there.

MP: That's nice. Is that part of what made you want to come to school at CofC?

MM: Yeah, but also it was like either this is or USC and I didn't really want to go to like.

MP: Where you grew up.

MM: Yeah. And I was like, "I'm going to come here." It was good because I at least knew like if it came down to it, down to it, like my auntie's there. Anytime we came to Charleston, that's where we'd always pull up. Yeah, yeah, I guess it was part of the decision. And I always had love for Charleston, but I was never able to--it would always be like, you pull up for like a weekend or a summer, a week or whatever, you know, I can never live, so it was good to be able to once I got here. And that's why I stayed too, because I like being able to vibe here and the family comes here a lot too because they like to visit my aunt. My grandma comes out here because she grew up here--she lives in New York right now but she's like, you know, just pulls up, catches the vibe.

MP: That's so nice--a little Lowcountry love.

MM: Yeah. I met one of my cousins, actually! I have a new cousin I didn't know who lived here, but his name's Leon, he fixes houses. But yeah, I was outside my auntie's house because I was taking her to get some groceries just like last week. But he was like, "Yeah, you here for Patty?" I was like, "Yeah, that's my auntie," and he said, "Oh, I'm your cousin then! Hey, how's it going? Nice to meet you!."

MP: "Hey new family!"

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MM: Exactly. So the fam gets bigger.

MP: That's so cool. Let me think. I guess like a little bit about college too: what was it like moving from Columbia, going to Charleston, and going to school at CofC? I mean, CofC is like crazy, insane, all white people almost it feels like. So what was that like going from, I mean, especially in middle school, when you're going to school with a lot of Black kids and then A.C. Flora and then CofC?

MM: A.C. Flora--it was easy because I could still--I was able to have people who I was able to meet, and I had my own circle. So in high school, I was kind of still reserved, chill, and then I went to college and I was still pretty reserved, but I was--I mean, you know this story because I met Charlie really randomly because the school just placed us in the same building. We got to school early for something and I just met Charlie like first day and then we obviously linked up. I remember this one time that I felt really anxious and just really aware of the whiteness and just how white the school is. It was like the first couple of weeks and it was me, Charlie, and our homie Donovan, who's Black, and I remember we pulled up to this party.

I don't know, but I just like caught a weird vibe and I dipped almost immediately. Because it was a whole bunch of--they were looking at me weird. I was like, "Uh." And before, a lot of times when people ask, "Who do you know?" You could always say, "Oh, I know dah-dah-dah," and obviously like I didn't like to pay too much of mind of it because it's like, yeah, I don't know anybody here, just trying to catch the vibe. But I had to hear--"All right, bro, like y'all always just pull up on me," so I was like, waiting and waiting for it to happen and it didn't happen but I could just catch that vibe. So then we just fucking dipped. And then I left and then Charlie was like, "Oh, like we were just chilling. You catch a bad vibe?" I said, "Yeah, just caught a bad vibe." I think Charlie didn't--he might not have felt it like that, I don't know what

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Charlie thinks, but I just, I felt. I mean he came out, we linked up because he's my homie, but I guess he didn't catch the vibe that I caught. That's when I was like, yeah, just different. In Charleston I've seen Confederate flags, I've saw--some dude, I went to this frat house. One of my old people who I used to be friends with. But he had like a chain, one of the beats was like Confederate or whatever. And then his homie is in the other room and I don't know what he was saying, but he used the hard r. I didn't say shit and I was waiting for him to come in the room so I could say some shit but the dude I was talking to came in--is the recorder still going?

MP: Yeah--uh. Let me check really quick, sorry. I don't know how to do this thing. Oh yes, it's going. Alright, sorry. Technology is like--I'm so sorry for interrupting you.

MM: That's all good. I feel like the app might be easier. I just recorded a conversation the other day. Anyways, uh.

MP: You were in this room with this guy.

MM: Yeah, and I didn't say shit but then he pulled up and he was like, "Oh, like I'm sorry." I was like, "Hey, don't apologize to me bro because you're going to say it again when I'm not here," and I just like left it at that. I was like, "I don't have shit to say to you." I handled my business then I dipped. But just shit like that. And that's why we didn't join the frats. We had a couple of different--like Tanner was a homie, couple different frat boys that we fucked with, but it was like, I'm not about to join this all-white frat just to be like your token dude. You know what I mean? Like I'm not here for that. I'm not here to like prove that y'all aren't racist. I'm not going to be your whatever.

That's why we just kept our squad and you know, we have like a diverse squad. But it's like we didn't have to join the frats, get in that scene. I kind of look back and I wish I had gotten more into the Black frat scene and did more like that, or like BSU and stuff, but at the end of the

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day, my experiences are my experiences. Moral of the story is I kinda like created my own space, I feel like, and my own friend group and moved in that way. I think they did a good job of--I took a lot of classes at the Avery Research Center. I think they make those types of classes available. They could've definitely done better to make Black people feel more welcome. That's something that they've been, I don't know what the fuck--they keep trying and I think they're making strides, but I don't know. I honestly haven't kept up with it like that.

MP: I think it was definitely harder under the last president of CofC.

MM: Oh yeah, being a fucking racist.

MP: Yeah, like owning a Confederate flag store or whatever. It will be interesting to see where they're going to go in the future.

MM: Yeah, President Hsu. I think he's going to do some good stuff.

MP: Yeah. He seems like a cool person.

MM: Yeah, no, I've seen him before. I think--I don't know if I dapped him up when I saw him, but I've been in the same room with him before. I wanted him to speak one of our events, like back before the pandemic, like right when I was like starting to pop up, trying to plan shit for the for the summer before we knew the summer was going to be canceled. Yeah, I asked him to speak and he's like, "Yeah, I'm down with it." Maybe I'll follow up now that--yeah, it'll be a different topic. But I can--ooh, I'll see if he's down to get into--I didn't even think about this. We were trying to an Afro-Asian, and we're still down to do it, food drive or something with the H&L Market. I gotta do it before somebody takes my fucking idea because this shit always happens. Because I said it, I just mentioned it--that shit has happened to me so many times that I get pissed off. I shouldn't have even said it.

MP: (crosstalk, inaudible)

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MM: Yeah, exactly. But I at least want people to get interested if they want to know about it. So it's like a balance, but yeah, I got to act on soon. I always say I've got to act on it soon. I left it, not on the back burner, but it's like on the long to do list of all the shit we've got to do.

MP: Yes, I mean, you're doing so much all the time. I feel like you're like constantly going, going, going. Before we get into what you're doing right now, let's talk a little bit, just a little bit about what you did after college. You were working, you had your entertainment--are you still doing Adesso?

MM: Yeah, I'm still doing it, it's still an LLC. We just haven't been getting many funds.

MP: It's also pandemic.

MP: Yeah, pandemic, but we're going to come out with some shirts for like a summer collection or something, just t-shirts and like some shorts, something simple. So that's in the works, but yeah. So after college, like literally right after graduation--right around the end of college, like spring slash winter, I had started doing art shows at my house with some homies like my homie, Jonathan Garcia, just a couple of different people who I just like being in community with. I remember our first show at Selective Hype, it was like this street wear store, and it popped off and that was like the catalyst. We had another show at Mynt next, that popped up, it was on the paper.

The cops were--and that was another pinpoint of the anti-Blackness in Charleston. We had our first hip hop show at Mynt and it was like, the police were alerted and dah-dah-dah, I was like, "Bro!" There was an incidence obviously when the show happened, but it's like going into it, that was already the expectation. And that was, you know, consistent. It was hard for us to get shows, hip hop shows like all the time. I had to maneuver and I had to get different artists. I

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had to even work with a country band--I fucking hate country. They ended up skeezing me over and so I hate working with country artists now. But anyways, yeah, I had to work with different artists. After graduating, I did that and I also had a steady finance, like nine to five job, doing commodity trading. So that was pretty much what I did for a year or two after graduation. Yeah, I just was consistent with that. I mean, it was tough, juggling both, but I mean I just figured it out. I always like to get my creativity out and I knew if I just did Adesso, I wouldn't be able to make enough money, and I knew if I just did commodity trading and I'd be bored as fuck.

It was hitting like a peak, like right before the pandemic. I got really in the weeds with commodity trading and I was also on tour with Clay and it was that point and another point before, but I just really hit a wall. I was going through a lot of stuff with commodity trading and I was literally on the road driving up by myself to New York and I was at a Starbucks and I remember--I don't know what was going on, but there was this report that I had to send, it was Friday, and I was really just like, "Damn. I can't do this shit." And for some reason the Starburst Wi-Fi was fucked up for some reason. I always think about that, but I feel like the whole Starbucks went gray. It just felt like everything around was like, "This shit fucking sucks." But it's wild because I was on the way to New York and I was excited for the show, but at same time I'm so angry and depressed about this job. So that's what I was saying, like when I quit my shit, I was like, "Ugh! Get out of my life."

MP: And the world's back in color again.

MP: Yeah, exactly. But I didn't get that catalyst for that until after the initial BLM protest. But that's pretty much what I did a year after, just balancing that. I had a girlfriend who I still talk to every now and again. She's like really active and she's marched with us a few times, more than a few times, almost most of the time. She does a lot of--I feel like she like--not

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activated me cause I was already active and doing shit. I fuck with her a lot because I feel like I was able to bounce a lot of the political stuff. And some people aren't about talking about that shit, but you know, when you have that person, who is on those type of issues, like I fuck with that. So we always had that and we still do sometimes, have deep conversations about what's going on, and education especially because she's a special ed teacher. That was pretty much the year after college. I guess trying to figure out that. Got a car. Trying to be an adult, it's fucking hard dude.

MP: Still working on it, me too.

MM: Fucking hard as hell. But I figured it out.

MP: Yeah! I mean, you're substitute teaching right now at Burke, which is fantastic. It seems like that--that seems like a really rewarding nine to five.

MM: Yeah. That's nice and I it's something I realized that it--what's the word. It's something I learned in one of my finance classes, I forgot what it's called, but it's what you get from something--and I'll think of the word, I'll think of it like when I'm at home alone. But it's like what you give some sort of--it could be money, it could be--like your reward for like doing it. When I went to college and being a finance major, you learn about so much money. You're like, "Oh yeah. I want to get out of school and make a hundred thousand dollars a year, whatever." And then you get a job that has high prospects, high growth, you know, you think, you'll put a lot of work in, get a lot of reward out of it. And then it's like, you get there and you're in that position. And then you're like, "Damn. I'm working my ass off and still, even though I'm working more than the person who's making a lot more than me in the company--" But it was just like, I realized how much more happy, like my happiness is worth way more than a ton of money. And you have balance: you can be happy and making a shit ton of money, it just depends

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on the career for you and who you're working with, and that's what I realized. I'm happy just teaching the kids and stuff. And I feel like that type of rewarding feeling, I don't know, it just can't be replaced with shit. Yeah, exactly. I get out of there and I'm like happy. Thinking about back when I was commodity trading, you know, get home, just like, "Yo, fuck this shit."

MP: It's like a good tired instead of a tired.

MM: Yeah, I get to work with some kids, you get to play for a little bit, you know, like that's cool. Like doing some small things, and like, yeah, it's a different type of tired. And I'm honestly like not even that tired, I'm usually monitoring the kids and stuff, but I mostly doing activist work on my computer. I don't really have to teach them, teach them, make sure they're doing the work. So I can read a book or like--I was talking to this one dude about coalition reform out in North Charleston and it was a pretty important call, but he was one of my mentors, so it was cool. But I was on the phone with him and one of the kids was like, "Dah-dah-dah. Shut the fuck up!" And I was like, "All right, I'm going to have to call you back," hung the phone up, and that's how they knew shit was real Like, "You're going to make this man hang his phone-- you were having an important conversation!" I was like, "Yeah, I was!" Anyways, I say all of that to say, you know, I like it. I always get mistaken for a kid there, which pisses me off. Literally happened last time yesterday, like it was like two girls, "Are you a student or a teacher?" I was like, "I'm a teacher." And I'll overdress to make it more known. Like I swear I'm a teacher!

MP: Yeah, like how much more.

MP: Have to wear my badge and all that. One time I was like locked out and I was knocking on the door and it was like, "Students have to go around." I was like, "Look at the badge!"

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MP: I started dying my hair gray because people at work were giving me grief for looking so young. And I was like, "Well, if I have gray hair, maybe--"

MM: Yeah. It's not working?

MP: It's not working!

MM: It's like, "Oh, she just switched her shit."

MP: Yeah! I guess let's talk a little bit about how you, quote, unquote, formally got into activism, how you really started organizing in earnest, I guess last summer? So what kind of, I mean, you were having discussions, you were activated, you were aware, you were recognizing all of these things that were happening in Charleston and nationally and internationally. I mean, the world kind of collectively went to shit last summer, but is that, is that the catalyst, is that really what got you going for the new chapter of Black Lives Matter Charleston or?

MM: I think what hit me the most, and I always look back at it and I think about it, I'm glad I was able to go visit and march with the family. But the Ahmaud Arbery shooting is the one that hit me a lot. And that's when I was like, "Damn." That was like the closest thing to a lynching. It was like a modern day lynching, but it was like, it was wild. And especially them being ex-police officers and then the cover-up behind it. I went out to the--I'm not going to get too deep into the story, but we marched with the family just in solidarity and it was wild, dude. Because it was the road where he got killed on so it was like that trauma, like seeing that video. But anyways, so that was still like spring, like March, April, when that was released, maybe in February. So that released, I was like, "Damn, bro." So I did a lot of research and from there--like that was more the catalyst and then obviously once the George Floyd video came out, that's when I was like, "All right, I have to do some shit."

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I looked up and did some research on Charleston Black Lives Matter, the one was formed by Muhiyidin [D'Baha]. I saw the Facebook and they hadn't posted anything since like 2017. I was like, you know, whatever, whatever, this is obviously not active, like with what's going on. And I was like, "Well, fuck it. Somebody has to do this shit." I knew once that video came out, like it was everywhere. People are gonna--this week is going to be insane. So I was like, we have to--somebody has to stand up and do this shit. So that's what I did. I talked to Mika [Tamika Gadsden] about it. I was thinking about conversations because me and Mika haven't always been on good terms, but she was like, "Marcus, there wasn't--like you're right, there wasn't an active chapter and you stood up and did this shit." The person that I was critiquing was up from the old chapter, I told her the same thing. I was like, "Y'all didn't post anything since 2017," and I'm not going to get too deep in our conversation, but she was like, "We did all this and like you're co-opting it," and it's like, bro, y'all haven't done anything in three years or four years. It's not co-opting, it's just somebody has to push that lever. And I did what I had to do and it's like, nobody's stopping y'all if y'all want to--we're still in community, but it's just like, whatever.

Anyways, what was I saying with that? But yeah, so I mean, as far as like how I formally got into it, I don't remember what day of the week it was, but I think it was like the day--so I watched the video of George Floyd, and the thing is either that day or the day after I started the page and I think our first post it was George Floyd with his fist up. Posted that, we just got a whole bunch of followers started coming in. I was like, well, I'm going to have this page just so people know what's going on. The initial protest happened. I think it was that Saturday one, and then shit popped off, and like I said, this shit was like in real time. Seeing this shit was fucking insane, dude. There was some, not any of our people, but there's some people who we are friends with who were out there and there was--we saw shit on Instagram live. Like shit was insane,

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dude. Like fucking tear gas everywhere, just people, mobs of people. I don't even want to say mobs--just normal people out there. But it's like, people were out there, out there, like on their shit. It was wild looking back after, you know, when the news came out. And the thing about it too, I was scared for a lot of reasons, one, because I know how the South is and two--all right, so that was Saturday, and Sunday we were having another protest because we had daily ones. So the Sunday after, we had a protest at Marion Square and that's the one that popped off and that's the one [inaudible] was at and it popped off in a different way and the police fought, hit back. They had rubber bullets, tear gas, all that shit. Like I said, I had started the page and we'd already gotten, I think 3,000 followers. My page was blowing up.

And that was the first one that I like really organized. Saturday one was just like self-organized by people just being there and knowing what's up. Then, like I said, Sunday was the first one we really organized. So Sunday, they hit back, got tear gassed, and I still have PTSD. I got tear gassed right by the corner of St. Philip and Coming Streets. And it was wild because like, we went to college there and I always thought of that as a safe place. I don't think of that area as safe anymore. I can never look at that one stretch between that space and Addlestone, it's just different to me now. See what happened was near the end of it, they had already shot a lot of us and made us move and march around, but they were coming down St. Phillip at this point. It was like this big tank and I guess we all collected around there and he was telling us to move and we just like stood steady like, no, we're not moving because this is like our last day because like they had already fucked a lot of us up. And a lot of people kind of dispersed. We were like, no, we're holding it down here. They had stopped us from moving up because they had us kind of trapped. Everybody was like right here, kind of in the back.

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I remember this clear as day, he played the "Bad Boys" song like "Bad boys, bad boys," I shit you not. And then they tear gassed us at maybe the end of the song. The tear gas came from close to Marion Square, but the wind was blowing towards this way, but my car was right in that little area, like on the side. So I was like, all right, boom, ran--I wasn't with anybody, but I told everybody, "All right, I'm going to go. I hope everybody stays safe," get to my car and I'm like, fumbling my keys and I opened my car, put my trombone in there, and then--I don't know. I guess as soon as I'm like getting in, the tear gas slid in car and got into my car and I was like, "Fuck." My whole face was like, literally can't see shit. And I was like, bro, what fuck the is this? But I was like, I need to go because like the tank is like right there, literally on the corner, like on that intersection and my car is right there. So I'm like, I have to dip. I'm like pretty much blind driving, and mind you the road's clear because like they have everything blocked off, so I'm driving blindly as fucking through this intersection. I stopped at the stoplight and I'm like, bro, I cannot drive any more, but I have some water on me so I get out of my car. The stoplight's going but there's cars driving by and I get out my car, pour water over my face. And I can imagine people who--I don't think people were in the library at that time, but the people who were just driving by like, "What the fuck is going on?" Like there's tear gas, this guy's pouring water down his face outside his car. Yeah. It's like, what the fuck is going on? I guess it just goes in like our first initial protest.

And then there was a lot of initial knee-jerk people not fucking with us from the old BLM chapter. They're like, "Who the fuck is this?" And then, you know, we talked, we had some hard conversations. Obviously from the death of Muhiyidin, it was like very people who took this shit personally. I mean, as they should. There's like, you know, who the fuck is this type of thing. I talked to Latisha [Imara], she was the first person who I reached out to, and there was initially

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some static. And then I think I just stood up to her one time, I was like, "I'm not gonna let y'all talk to her--" she was talking to somebody on the team, like all up and down. And I was like, "Nah, I'm not about to let you just talk to her like that. If you need to talk, talk to me, we can talk, but it's like, don't talk to her anymore. We can talk between us." Like I said, initially a lot of static, but I literally was talking to her yesterday and I'm like a little brother to her now. We're tight now. We have such a good relationship; I met her kids actually. But that was the initial static, but she's the one who embraced me first and she was a big co-organizer with Muhiyidin. Some of the original organizers who organized with Cody and even Carter [?] who is still with us now, and this dude in--not even mentioning him, we don't associate with him now but he was associated with Muhiyidin. It took a minute for everybody to really like, "Oh yeah. Like y'all are the official chapter," it took a minute and it just took us doing and being out there, the work has to speak for itself.

And that's kind of what we did initially and, you know, looking back on it and this is a criticism I have with one organization in particular, I'm not going mention their name, but you know who they are--and they are a Black-led organization and they do a lot of good work. Even on the East Side, I think they're doing a food drive right now, actually. What time is it? Eleven, yeah they're doing a food drive right now. Their whole idea of it is they formed and then they took six months, or I think four months to like plan out their ideology and political building. And I think that's important, but they didn't do pretty much any work really in the community other than I think one of them volunteered for one of our Thanksgiving things, but wasn't really like too deep in doing a lot of--they did like some stuff. And they said they purposely like kind of stood away just because they wanted to get their political ideology down. And I was like, I think that's so dope. But at the same time people are starving and people need help now.

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We were doing a whole bunch of mutual aid events and we didn't get that much help. We told everybody about it. Didn't get much help. And then I guess within the next like four or five months, recently within the last four months, five months, they've been doing it and they've been criticizing me. I think the person who I said gave me a real big critique, she was like, "What do y'all do?" And she said she purposefully doesn't follow me, follow the page, but I was like, if you don't know--and I explained to her what we do. I was like, "We do so fucking much, dude. We've been doing a lot of this shit that y'all are just starting to do," but I'm not going to go too deep into that. But like I said, the work spoke for itself.

And as far as like me being the leader, that's a whole story in itself. It's a short story, not going to drag it out too long. So I started the page and gave everybody ownership, anybody who wanted to do their thing. I guess it was like summertime, like around July 4th and there was a vote--it was before July 4th, but it was a vote. It was like, should Marcus be leader or president. And the vote was should Marcus be president, should somebody else be it, or no president at all. I think me being president got the least amount of votes. Somebody else was like second place for least. And then the majority was like, we shouldn't have a leader. I was like, okay, that's cool. I mean, I guess that's the vote, you know what I mean? Like, I'm not going to like--it's a group. So I was like, all right, boom.

So I just like did a whole bunch of work and I made connections on the East Side, made connections in Mount Pleasant. At this point, I want to get more out of North Charleston, more connected there, but we have connections in like most of the--even in Goose Creek, Summerville, just like broadening that network. And obviously there's so many places we haven't--like the Bend, we miss out on that a lot. It was a lot of just me being out there and doing that community building and stuff and bringing stuff to the group, like, "Hey, this is happening,"

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or "Hey, you know, this is going on." And I had just like naturally became the leader and that's kind of just how it happened. I put in a shit ton of work. I was like, thinking about that, sometimes you have to work. And there's a cheesy quote that everybody says, it's like, "Work like a soldier so it's hard to find the captain," or something like that. So that's what I've been doing and I still do that, like boots on the ground. That's kind of how I got started out and, you know, got everything officiated. Stuff is still in the mix because we're still not at a certified nonprofit because you want to be the nonprofit where you can do political endorsements. Think it's a 501, it's not a C--but anyways, I should probably know this. We have a lawyer on the team who's helping us out with it. And that's new, just team building.

That's another thing too. Like the turnover, dude, with leftist organizations, just volunteer organizations in general, grassroots. It's so hard because we're not able to pay anybody really, unless it's maybe a food thing, but most of the times it's like all volunteer work. I know it's just tough because like I said, it's like getting people to like coalesce around something. You continuously do it. It's like one, it's sometimes traumatic. Like people are trying to do their own-- have joyful days and peaceful days, and its lots of talking about real shit, serious shit. It's tough. And also too, there's some people who want to do stuff, but they don't like, we had this real leftist dude who was about it and he just dropped recently. His criticism was wild because--it's been learning lessons, just being a leader and having to deal with that type of stuff. But he was like, "Yeah, I don't think the stuff y'all are doing. Like, it's good, but I could be doing more stuff in my community." And I was like, "Dude, like I'm at a food drive as we speak right now," or I had one the next day, "You can pull up and we can talk about it there." And he had COVID for like two weeks so this was like maybe three weeks after he initially told me he had COVID and he was like, "You know, we're not doing it." I was like, "Bro, you had COVID for two weeks,

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dude. Like I was letting you quarantine and do your thing and that's why I didn't invite you to some of the stuff we do." So mind you, he got COVID and he joined maybe like two weeks before so that was his experience with the group, half of it he had COVID. I was like, I don't know. And then there's some stuff where he did make some good points for us, but I was like, I can't have--and he understood that he didn't want to be in the community with COVID obviously.

But it's been like learning how to be a leader, learning how to just roll with the punches, and Latonya [Gamble]'s told me this: sometimes you got to step by yourself. Like you're going to be by yourself a lot of times. Latonya has just been a real big mentor to me. I have so much love for that lady because she has real-ass talks with me and she's just such a G. That's something I really take from her. She's definitely just always said this and she drops a gem on me sometimes. And sometimes she has stepped by herself and that's how it is sometimes. Sometimes you gotta be that initial person, like, all right, I'm going to do this shit. And I'm a real let's do this shit type of person. I feel like I've been going to draw, but the last recent time I was like, "All right, let's do this shit," and it turned out well, we had this coalition that I was just talking about. I was on a call with Paula in North Charleston in regards to the North Charleston Racial Bias Audit and we had the two listening sessions, and it was actually the girl who was critiquing me, it was on the second listening session. She was like real active, vocal, she was like this needs to be done, this needs to be done, but there's no like real organizing behind it. While she was doing that, I was sliding into people's Zoom direct messages, like, "Yo, we're having a follow-up meeting next week, like let's link up. Boom, boom, boom." I got a good list of maybe ten, ended up being like twenty people who showed up to the meeting--like powerful: NAACP, ACLU, CAJM, North Charleston community leaders. It was one of those moments where I was like, "All right, we

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have this meeting with the CNA, let's talk about making like a community coalition around this to continue this work," and it took a minute for that to happen. But it was like one of those moments I felt like sharing. It's kind of like my whole idea, sometimes like you wait patiently for some things, but sometimes you just have to do this shit. That's the type of person I am and kind of like how I started being alone. Sometimes you gotta step.

MP: It seems like from what you're saying, there's a lot of talk about talk.

MM: Yeah.

MP: In the local, in the different groups that are in the communities here. I didn't realize the extent that the tensions like between and even in the groups, just like how it can get, like you said, staticky.

MM: Yeah. And there's always something going on. That's been the stuff that like directly affects me. There's been static in other stuff that I've had to stay out of because it doesn't have to do with me, you know. So I stay out of it, I'm on neutral terms with a lot of folks and on like less than neutral terms with some folks, but I try to keep it G. Like at the end of the day, I'm gonna continue the work. And that's how I feel like me and Latonya are similar in that way, the work's just got to keep going, no matter what happens. If I don't do the work, you know, it's just not gonna get done.

MP: So, you work with ECDC [Eastside Community Development Corporation] often, you're there a lot. Um, are you there as Marcus or are you there as Marcus, the leader of BLM?

MM: I'm there as both. So they'll introduce me as that and they'll be like, "Oh yeah, Marcus leads the local chapter." And I think she does that on purpose to people I know and I think that honestly helps my street cred some. Because people fuck with the idea of Black Lives

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Matter but they don't know about the local organizations and a lot of times they'll have the sign in their front door, but don't really know who the fuck I am, or have a shirt on.

MP: Like, "Oh, that's me."

MM: Yeah and I'm not the movement, but at the same time--and a lot of the times too, people will donate to the national organization, but they'll be from Charleston. It's like, just donate to us, dude. Like, you know what I mean? Like that's just never going to funnel down. I mean, maybe, they do grants now, so it might, but at the same time, it normally doesn't. That local stuff is important. So to answer your question, I'm there in both ways, like all the kids know me as CHS BLM Marcus and they rock with me, and they're like, "Yo, what do you do?" And I'm like, "I'm an activist." So they see me as kind of both. I'm not always--I don't get to everybody because a lot of people know what the fuck's going on already. So it's like, I don't have to educate you on this shit. Because most of the time, people just come there and need help for something like, "I need to sign up for unemployment," or like do this, sign up for this program or sign this job application, check the resume or something. So I'm in that role there.

We do our programs; we did the Black history event at St. Julian Devine with them. We're trying to do another one, I want it to be like Kings and Queens theme for Africa Day, which is on the 25th, which unfortunately is the anniversary of George Floyd's murder. But excuse me, we're trying to send maybe the weekend before and then have Africa, like type of week style thing. And then we'll probably have a have a vigil for the 25th and then they're trying to have an anniversary of the uprisings or something. Yeah, I don't know where I was going with that. Just like, I'm in that role, I like push the Afrocentric vibe. Latonya will say stuff like, "I don't want it to sound racist," and I'm like "Nah! You saying what it is," and I'm the one, I'm not afraid to say like, "This shit is racist." She'll say stuff like, "I don't mean racist," when it's like

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Afrocentric and like, "No, no, Latonya, it's not racist. It's about us." We, we have a lot of like philosophical talks and like I said, I consider her one of my mentors and I look up to her a lot. Yeah, I play different roles, you know, we just talk a lot and I use our resources to just bring money there to the center. And that's another thing that I was like, "Shaggy?" Like when--it's funny, I'm wearing the shirt--when...ah, I'm not gonna say names, but when the critiquer was saying about like, "What do y'all do?" They do a lot of work at our center. Like they do a food drive, I linked them up with Latonya so they could the food drive there. It's like, "What do you do?" It's like that center where y'all do the food drives, I helped put money in that. We pretty much went halvesies, not halvesies, but like, we probably put at least like 5,000 to 10,000 dollars into the ECDS's pockets for them to construct it and do the paint. It looks amazing in there, and I'll show you the before and after, but it's like, it's literally like night and day, dude. And it's like-

MP: It was--yeah, when I was in there the other day, I was like, this is such a comforting place. Like the computers look amazing, too. And it's like all those little alcoves. Y'all did a great job.

MM: Yeah, thank you. It was a lot of efforts between a lot of people, we worked on together and they started the GoFundMe and we shared it and made another whole poster for it. And you know, like I said, really just like popped it off, and then for her--and when she said that I was like, "Bro, you just don't know, I guess because you haven't followed up. We do the work." It's stuff like that that's really like stamped us, people know about our work before anything. And I've had to fire some real comebacks with some people who are on Instagram and Facebook who will be like, "BLM does this. Why don't they help the kids?" Donate to our learning center motherfucker, let's go. "Oh, well, y'all focus on this problem. What about economic

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empowerment?" Donate to our Black power financial literacy center. Unless you don't know about it, like shut the fuck up. So I've been able to really shut some people down. It's like in a respectful way. If you want to help, there's things to do. If you think gang violence is bad, we have Guns Down Chucktown up in North Charleston. We do a lot of work with them too. We agree that it's a problem, but it's like, what the fuck are you going to do about it? And I forgot a lot of times they will blame BLM in general, about a lot of societal shit. It's like, we are in the same situation with you, like we are Black people and still face this shit. Don't come at us.

Especially too with like the financial shit, especially recently. Patrisse Cullors has been under accusations for shit and it's like, y'all don't get mad at Bill Gates and all these other vulture, nonprofit motherfuckers because they're white, and it seems like white people would deserve to have all these nice houses. They don't really--I don't want people sharing stories like that. They don't think that that's what they're saying, but that's what they're saying is, "Oh, she doesn't deserve to have a nice house," and like that's what you're saying. I understand some of the critiques are saying at the end of the day, like they don't have that same smoke for like Bill Gates or any other rich white person who does nonprofit work or does this that and the other, but we'll have all this smoke for Black organizations or somebody who is trying to do something. So I've had to deal with that even locally, people trying to come blow smoke at us. And that's just like, dude, like we're doing our best, the best we can do with our capacity. Like if you want to help, the doors are open, doors, church are open, but if you're not--we have stuff to do. So I'll talk to you later.

MP: Will you talk a little more about the Black Power Financial Literacy Class? Did you, was that like kind of inspired by all your financial--?

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MM: It definitely was. I don't know if I told you about that or--yeah, you know about this. Because I think this is when I went to--I think I was at Corinne when this happened. I went to Ghana for my study abroad trip and we learned a lot about micro-finance there and about financial literacy, and they have programs there and just learning about all the issues, like as far as like credit discrimination. We learned about a lot of that stuff in Africa and that happens here, like redlining and all that shit in a racist way. And there, like the funds aren't there and the banks just like, they wouldn't give loans to anybody. Yeah, it's different there, but I learned a lot about the parallels and stuff from here. I was in the micro finance club in school. So that was our whole thing, just like learning about that and learning about how to help people and like nonprofit work and stuff like that, about budgeting, how to teach people about this. I mean, yeah, to answer your question. Yeah. It was inspired by my finance background and like I said, that's one about our three tenants or goals: economic empowerment, education reform--not only curriculum-wise, but like youth programs and stuff--and then criminal justice reform and abolition are our main tenants. At least in my head, if we can continue to do stuff around those three points, we're winning. Like if we can be advocates on the criminal justice side, like, boom, if I continue the Black Power Financial Literacy Center and advocate for economic empowerment, that's great. Then the learning center, just to continue doing stuff like that, it's the trifecta, at least in activism for me. The national ideologies kind of revolve around that too. So like we've looked at their mission statements and you know, like I said, we're an independent chapter but we follow almost all the BLM chapters in the United States or all of them that at least have an Instagram. So we try at least, you know, keeping tabs with what's going on.

MP: Do you work closely with any other chapters?

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MM: No, I mean, I'll just shout them out sometimes. The New York state one, we share a lot of stuff, back and forth DM them sometimes. But yea, not really. Sometimes there's some organizers in Georgia who we rock with, some Charlotte ones, some folks from Virginia, weirdly enough, but yeah, it just depends. We haven't--because everybody's so deep in--there's always shit going on in your own community. So sometimes like it's hard enough to be like, "All right, what did y'all want to do?" But sometimes I will reach out and be like, "Y'all doing this program, this is dope. How can we replicate that?" Or I hit people up in New York a lot. [inaudible] I gauge what they're doing, kind of get people's take. All right, so y'all did this. How can we get that shit here? Even though it's impossible. Maybe we can do the steps. Because a lot of times they've done shit like ten years ago and we haven't even done this shit, so it's like, "What did y'all do five years ago? Maybe we can do that shit," because we're so fucking backwards. So there's some community but, like I said, people do their own thing.

MP: You mentioned that you've done some coalition-y stuff: CAJM, NAACP, ACLU. But do you do, as the work you do for Black Lives Matter, is it mostly just Black Lives Matter or are you close with other local community groups here too?

MM: I don't know, I mean, I don't know if I'm understanding your question that well. So, I do work with the coalitions, there's a lot of different--there's not too many, I guess there cannot be too many, but there are a lot of different coalitions. Like there is United Front. There is the public safety coalition with Lowcountry Action Committee, ACLU, and all of them. Then there's CGCC which I'm on, which is more like--what's the word--less leftist, more liberal. Like the police, the sheriff's on it, the solicitor's on it, that type of thing. So it's like real bureaucratic type thing and it's a city program. To answer your question, I do a lot of work just as a representative of CHS BLM for the coalitions. So it's like, it'd be mostly like that. As far as the work I do it's

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kind of like what we decide. At the end of the day, most times we'll push the needle on it, sometimes people bring stuff to my team, "Well, yeah, maybe we should do something like that," but as far as like what we do--well, one, it depends on what's going on, but you know, it was kind of like what we start to like put our toes in, you know, step to.

MP: You've also gone to the State House. Once? Twice? Couple of times?

MM: I've pulled up twice. I need to pull up again, I need to figure out when the next meeting is, but yeah, there was a law enforcement reform meeting there and I had to pull up because I was like--I pulled up to the one before and there was like two before. There was one about prison and bail reform and then there was another one about law enforcement. So I went to the first one and saw someone we rock with who is like an inmate advocate, and then because the jail system in South Carolina is so fucked up, but was I going with this? So yeah, went there for that. And then they had the second meeting, the law enforcement, like I said, and it was just bullshit. It was like all like law enforcement officials who were pretty much patting themselves on the back and the politicians were saying, "Yes, we'll give you more money for all this training," that doesn't fucking work and little body cameras they can turn off whenever they want. So yeah, I listened to the whole thing. It was like maybe a three hour meeting and I was like, bro, I'm gonna have to say some shit at the end. So I was hoping to be--it wasn't on the agenda about public comments, but I was like, I have to say some shit. I literally got up and I was like, "Dah-dah-dah, the--" I don't know what the percentage is, but I think it's out of all the police agencies in the state, I want to say it's like 36--oh, I'd have to get a number. I think it's like, oh man, I'm forgetting the exact percentage, but it's around like 36 percent. All right, I'm not going to say that. It's like 75 out of 370--fuck it, I'm not going to get the right number, but yeah, it's around 35 percent. It's a bad number, it's like under 60, it's a fucked-up number. But of police

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departments in this state are certified by anything. Like there's like only 26 percent that are certified, that have their state certification. Isn't that wild?

MP: What does that mean though? They just do--

MM: Yeah, they just have their whatever law--not even state certified. And they could just be a police force. And the state will pay for this shit too. I don't even think it's that much to pay for somebody to like implement it or whatever, but it's like, you just have to do it pretty much. And it's under 60 percent. It's like at least like 35 to 40 percent. And that's why I stood up. I was like, "That's a shame, dude. Like y'all sitting here thinking that's cool. Like what the fuck?" So I pretty much said that in less layman's terms--well, I was trying to say that and they were pretty much like, "No, like there's no public comment thing. If we let you speak, we have to let everybody speak." And I was like, "Fuck this, I'm going to say one last thing," and I said, "Statewide mandatory racial bias audit. And that's it," and I left. They cut off the mic and everything, didn't let me speak. So I left and then I was sitting outside and one of the--I think it's Thigpen, Representative Thigpen is his name. He came outside and said, "Yeah, bro, want to hear you speak but," and he didn't say it in like a dismissive way, but he was like, "Yeah, show up to the next one. I'm glad, you know, we need young people like you out here on this shit." So I was like, boom, come here next time. Went there next time, they let me speak and I gave them my statements. I think I did a really good speech. I want to go back and listen to it because I feel like--there was some parts where I stepped up on or skipped up on, but I remember I was talking to somebody after and she was like, "Yeah, like I was snapping it back. You were going in." And I was like, "Thank you."

I remember one point, I made the illusion or metaphor, because this is the bad apples thing. I was like, "For bad apples, the form, you have to give them an environment to form,

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there's pathogens. If they're an outsider and get bad pathogens and if they're inside, yada-yada-yada. You can't just say they're a bad apple and let those exist. You have to make sure that the environment is--you have to be surgical about it." And that's where I was like, with the racial bias audit, that's a way we can be surgical and know what's going on and know what pathogens exist in the environment. Then a lot of people were saying--people didn't clap, but it was like, "That was some shit you were saying. That was one of the high points, you're a real one for that." So I went up there for those times. Another wild takeaway is the meeting where I got shut down, when they were like, there's no comments, somebody from CGCC, I was talking with them--and this is before I became a community representative... I started my racial bias audits in the talk with them and they were like, "Oh yeah, like I was listening to a state house meeting and there was somebody in the meeting, he was saying something about--" And I was like, "That was me! Yeah, they didn't let me speak." He was like, "Yeah, they didn't let him finish speaking," and I was like, "Yeah, I know!" So I've been up there three times at this point. I went up there for an education meeting too. It's wild because, I've been there multiple times when I was in high school because there was a youth in government program, so I've been in the state house and in the chambers before, like pretend debating on a mock government type program. I told my old history teacher, and he always loves all shit the I'm doing. "I literally took you to the state house now you actually doing this shit yourself!"

MP: Was this from Flora?

MM: Yeah, from Flora. He's like the coolest history teacher and he just glad I'm doing the shit I'm doing.

MP: That's cool. I feel like I might know the answer to this, but do you see yourself ever getting into politics?

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MM: Uh, it's something I've been battling with honestly. I could see it and it's something like early on I was like, I could see myself being a politician, but it's difficult now. Especially with the leftist circles, Black politicians always get unnecessary hate and heat. Sometimes it's reasonable, sometimes it's like--and it'll be from their own community a lot, like Kwadjo, he got run out of the East Side. Like a lot of people from here didn't want him here, but he's still to this day will rock with the Black interest that's going on in the city. But it's like from his own people would just like a lot of hate. Even like recent example, what's his name? He's like the--I forgot his name. Bald dude--oh, Rutherford. Mika went out on him really hard. I didn't really comment on it because me and Mika were on the best terms at that point, but we're good now. But anyways, she was going in on him, it was like, "Black politicians, dah-dah-dah-dah," like going in, and I remember, it was probably a week later, somebody was going in on what's his name? It was like a North Charleston city council member. He was like, "They always go bad on Black politicians." I was like, "You just did that with the person before!" And the reason she went in on him was because he had went on some like private jet, some trips with his new wife. I was like in my eyes, because they've volunteered with us before. But in my eyes I was like, it's their honeymoon! Let them--I get it, probably shouldn't have done it on taxpayer funds, that's some fucked up shit. But it's like, dude, what about the other politician? I feel like they're not the only ones in history who've ever done that shit. Let them have their honeymoon dude.

Anyways. I don't know. I think that if I do, it'd be something I do when I'm young because I don't want to be one of those old politicians. They get so fucking comfortable. So if I do it, I'd probably do it like 25 and try to cut myself like 30 or 35. Because 35 is like when you're, I don't know, your brain chemistry changes. Like you're a different person, especially when you're 40. I would never want to be over 40--you're not going to catch me doing that. I'd

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rather just what Latonya does. That could possibly be my future. She wants me to take over with some of the program director stuff, like near future, because she wants to go back to being on the planes and stuff as a stewardess. So to answer your question, I could maybe see it, but I guess it'd be something that I want to do at the local level. I wouldn't want to run like a US Senate or something, you know, there's a bunch of fuckheads we need to get out of there. I mean, I'm not afraid of getting like bad press, but just like.

MP: I feel like it'd be hard to get a lot done. Like the further away from local you go.

MM: Exactly. And there's a lot of local power dude. Like even with the caller saying like, [inaudible] and the ACLU, there's so much power on that call. We were talking about doing some advocacy work around, getting another, system review board. And it was like, we have the people power right here. Like push some shit. Like this group we even have here-- we had the immigration coalition there too. It was like a multiracial front. I don't know where I was going with that. We have more people power than sometimes politicians will.

MP: Yeah, and there's always the weird, quote, unquote, obligations that I feel like politicians just carry sometimes. But I had another question about something. Oh, at St. Julian Divine's, the art show you've been doing with the kids. How many kids did you have at last one?

MM: It was seven kids last one. And we're trying to have another one, like I was saying with the Africa Day and I didn't get to tell you the full scope of that. I want to be like Kings and Queens theme and I want it to have different leaders from Africa that aren't spoken about. There's one queen. I'm kicking myself because I don't even remember her name, but you probably seen her picture. I low-key want to be controversial and do the anti-colonial like leaders--I definitely want, actually, I'm not going to say maybe. Well, what I might not do--and I was thinking was like, this would be funny and people probably try to crucify me for it, but do

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Gaddafi. I've learned a lot about Gaddafi, dude. It's like, yes, he did a lot of fucked-up shit, but at same time, what America and the rest of the world's left Libya, Gaddafi would have done a better job pretty much. Libya was like number one in literacy rates in Africa, it had one of the highest GDPs. Like he was trying to make a united, like a central bank for Africa, like all this shit, and they killed him. I looked at videos now, like from the Vietnam era, it was like, "Yeah, like we fought to get Gaddafi out. But honestly like now fuck this mother fucker! Look where we're at now." And he said, if you could've went back in time, you know, somebody from Libya, he was like, I would've done it different. We would've all pretty much preferred Gaddafi. So thinking about doing a themed event like that. But yeah, it was a really good show out. The kids made around like four or five hundred dollars split up between them. But yeah, we had people bidding. The mayor was there, his wife. She bid on a whole bunch of things. Historic Preservation Society bid on everything at first, just to get some interest in it.

MP: Was that the group that was really concerned about the smokestacks?

MM: Yeah.

MP: That's what I thought. That was a whole thing. Yeah, no, I only just recently learned about St. Julian Divine. What a cool guy though.

MM: Yeah, I still don't know much about him.

MP:

I found an article I'll send you. Cool people, he was the first, since Reconstruction, he was the first Black city council member in Charleston, I think like '65 maybe. I'll send you some stuff. Gosh, I don't know. I mean, we've talked about so much. Do you have anything that you want to--any big thoughts, any words you want out there preserved for forever?

MM: Well, I feel like we haven't talked about police as much.

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MP: We haven't! Yeah.

MM: You want to talk about that?

MP: Absolutely.

MM: Do you have a question already?

MP: I want to hear what you had to say about police first. What are your first thoughts?

MM: Well, we want to go back to when I was a kid, just those experiences, like early on, dude, like with that, that kind of shaped me in a way. It didn't like radicalize me at the time I don't think, but it did just like, like I'm just a motherfucker from that neighborhood to you? I'm a person, I'm a human. And the way they dehumanized gang members and like stuff like that. And just like looking at, like, I grew up with gang members, Folk Nation, those people. I feel like for a lot of people, they don't understand this shit, but it's like, I don't know. It's like you not understanding it and over-criminalizing it, it's gonna put kids in jail. Even some of the kids I work with at Burke, they're talking about like--I think one of them's like Real Right Blood. He's in ninth grade. This gang task force, you're attacking kids like him. It's like maybe if you give them more opportunities and help his mom out with the bills or something, he wouldn't be doing this shit. Maybe he still would. Those early experiences definitely shaped me.

MP: Just the criminalization of Black kids.

MM: Of that yeah, of Blackness. Even if you go back to the hip hop show, like, you know, we can't even have loud music. They already think we're already on some shit. That experience and just like my experience personally with police, I get stopped all the time. I've never gotten like--oh, there was one time I ran from the cops and they tried to tase me, and this is something that I didn't think about it, but like, I'm glad they didn't shoot me or anything, but this was back when I was in high school. So I've always had like different run-ins and stuff. My

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views on it definitely have radicalized a little bit since I've been doing movement work because I've seen--and I've done my own research and studied the history of them as runaway slave patrols and the stop and frisk and even recently there was this one police officer who actually-- Reynolds, they fired him, but they keep him anonymous to protect his identity or something. What the officer did was they like just write tickets, had like a quota system or something like that. It's something that everybody knows obviously, but they say that they don't do it, and then they got called out with this shit. They obviously, like I said, they fired him or whatever, but it was like that damage has already been done, that trauma has been done. So I moved past like their forum, like I'm more of an abolitionist. I think we can live in a world without police and prisons. I do think it takes a lot of work for that to happen. We have to disarm, dismantle, and create a world--I saw a map about this recently, but the wealth inequalities in America are so fucking wild. You think it wouldn't be as bad. I have to look at the graph so I can show you this real quick. But it's wild bro. Oh this is actually--I don't know if I showed you this, but this is at the center before. Yeah, isn't it night and day?

MP: Yes!

MM: Yeah, night and day. Anyways.

MP: Do you want some more water?

MM: Yeah, I'll get some.

MP: I got you. Want some ice cubes?

MM: That'd be dope.

MP: Yeah, pull up that graphic though.

MM: Yeah, I'll pull it up. But yeah, so the wealth inequality is so fucking bad in America.

The police are here to criminalize poverty nine times out of ten. If we can't live in a world where

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y'all are the violent arms of capitalism and enforcing that, it's like can't live in a world like that. So yeah, that's kind of where my mind's shifted towards. I think we can live in a world without them. We've lived in worlds before, police haven't always existed. It takes some time and it take some organizing, but I'm going forward. Like I said, it's not going to be overnight. It's not going to be in my lifetime most likely, but I think it's a possibility in a world we can live in.

MP: Someone, some generations got to start that process and it looks like it's ours. Or no, I mean, it's been going on, but I feel like lately, I mean, people are just really pushing, which is great. Here you go. Um, let me formulate a question. I have a lot of thoughts--

MM: Do you have an iPhone charger I could borrow?

MP: Yeah, I think there's one on that wall there.

MM: Got it. Maybe.

MP: If not, there's one in my room I can grab.

MM: No, I've got it. Yeah, so the correct statement is--this is the graphic. So the country's wealth distributed equally and the average person, I mean, how much wealthier, and America is six times. And it's normally like two times some other places, but six times here. And the average is two times richer, seven times in Russia. The average global wealth, it'd be different, I guess we'd come up less because we're a richer nation overall, but that shows that. It just shows how unequal wealth is in our country. We usually think of ourselves as like, "Oh, you know, pull yourself up by your bootstraps." It's obviously not the case. Like even in other parts of the world, it's like at least equal dude, but you know, like we're so rich, but so unequal. It sets these disparities.

MP: Which are reinforced by--

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MM: The police. And that's my ideology and I've had to buck heads with some many-- like the police chief, and all them for this shit. And I've called them out on Zoom before. I can't wait to get back in person so I can just like look at him in the face because sometimes that's needed. And show them I'm not afraid of you, dude. Like you have a gun, I have a gun too. I'm not going to shoot you because I'd go to jail for the rest of my life and you'll probably fucking get away. So I've had to hold them to the fire a few times. I've done it Al Cannon, the sheriff even, the new one and the old one, and the chief because he says some off the wall shit about gangs. I was on a call at CGCC, and this is why I like have to call CGCC out sometimes because--and they have a role because somebody has to have these meetings with the cops. They had their meeting and then this man was talking something about like there's some people that just have to stay in jail. Like they keep coming back out there, like repeat offenders. And I sent him a link--just thinking about it pisses me off--I sent him a link about why the super predator theory is bad. And I sent it to the general Zoom link and I bet there's some people like, "This n--- - wild!" Some people were like "This, this, this!" And I was like, "Yeah."

Some people were like, "After he's finished his statement, does anybody have something to say?" I was like, "All right, I have something to say!" and unmuted and I finished that like, "Yeah, dude, that predator theory, that's fucked up. You say you're out in the community. I'm in the East Side right now, I only see you when some shit's popped off and you know that that's true." He's even said statements towards Latonya--not like against her but he's made some statements when talking with her and she's like, "Nah, I don't fuck with that." This was back during the protests, it was afterwards, and I guess a trash can was on fire and it was outside of the projects. But yeah, somebody after the trash can fire, allegedly, they came through and like tear gassed, was shooting rubber bullets everywhere and shit. It just, it was some bullshit, and the

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chief was like, "Well, you know, y'all have a real bad drug problem out there." It was like that doesn't have anything to do with why the fuck y'all were out here! So that statement alone lost a lot of respect, the chief lost a lot of respect from Latonya and the East Side community in general because she speaks for the East Side a lot. Like I said, it was just like, it was some, I don't know. It was some other shit. But besides that, I had to call him out about his shit, just like, "Yo, these super predators you talk about, these are my kids. The average gang member is this age. Maybe if you gave them some resources and do something, we wouldn't be in these positions. You do all this performative shit, but shit don't really mean anything." Like no one fucking needs an ice cream truck, we don't need this shit. People need jobs and actual shit. Like they get, you know, the average gang member is this age dude...

And he was saying something too. He was saying this one person, "He's off now and I know he's running around with his gun," and it's like, "Yeah, you're running around with your gun too, bro! You ain't going to take a bullet if somebody try to shoot him." Look at it from the other side, dude. Like these people have families. Like what if he dies, who's gonna take care of his kids? Not your bitch ass. So it's like I had to call him out, call Al Cannon out. Al Cannon tried to outcast me as a whole fucking joke, I'm glad it's the last conversation that happened. Because the last time I saw him was at the Lindsay Graham rally and I gave all of them some words of mouth for me. I went solo dolo, but I was over there turn out. I was like, "Fuck you, Lindsay Graham," and I didn't even know some Lindsay Graham rally. It was like right beside my home girl's house and I thought it was a Trump rally and then the Lindsay Graham bus pulled up and I was like "Oh, shit." Like I'm staying for this shit. I actually tried to play "Fuck Donald Trump" at the end, but they ended up running me away and they tried to call the police on me

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and I had my strap on me so I was like, "Oh, fuck, I probably need to go." Anyways, I was like, this is not where I need to go. I can't go out like this so I dipped.

But what was I going to say? Calling out police. I called out Al Cannon too and this was the last conversation, and he was like trying to appease me on some shit. Long story short, they wanted to get a white, older gentlemen who--I don't even know. He works with a lot of inmates. I don't even know why the fuck he asked me this question. But he was like, "We work with all inmates. We don't like to see color." Like it's mostly Black male inmates that look just like me, so focus on them. They're the main population. Don't try to like rainbow color this shit. Like I'm glad you help everybody but Black people need the most help, Black males, especially. So anyways, I was like, boom, like that's how I feel about things, and he was like, "Oh, like tell me about the Black experience." So I was like, all right, I'm a humor you this time, "This is how the fuck it is. I grew up over-criminalized," I didn't mind, I told him that story. I don't think they had time but I was pissed off. I was like, "With the shit we go through, we don't have any experience--our dad didn't have, our family didn't have the money to do all this shit." And then Al Cannon just chimes in--he said this one thing and that just pissed me off. I already knew he was on to some bullshit, and then the second thing pissed me off even more and that's when I called him out.

But the first thing he said, "Oh, if you need a mentor, like somebody look up to, I know Tim Scott!" I was like, "Boy oh boy. I do not want to fucking meet Tim Scott. I'm not talking about me; I don't need a mentor. I'm talking about these kids out here." Like the average kid, forty percent of Black youth grow up in poverty. This shit's a real reality for folks. I don't want to meet Tim Scott, these folks don't want to meet Tim Scott. Anyways, second thing he said that pissed me off, and this is just shows about the leadership of the police, they're so backwards. But

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he was like, "Yeah, like I feel you Marcus, like I grew up like--" mind you, Al Cannon was born I think the same year as Emmett Till, like '46 or something. But he was like, "Yeah, I feel you. Like, I grew up poor," and Lindsay, Graham likes to do this too, "I grew up poor. My family was--" Like, you grew up poor white. Like you say the whole thing. Like you grew up as a poor white in the fifties. Programs are meant to get you out of this shit and you were able to benefit from them. And now that you've benefited, you like to attack welfare. You benefit still today, like more white people are on welfare than Black people. But if you listen to what the news says about it, you'd never know that. They like to paint that as like the things, "All Black people love welfare." It's like "Bro, you enslaved us and brought us here. Like what the fuck? And then discriminated us continuously to this day."

Like even today, a Black sounding name is less likely to get a job. I was arguing with somebody recently. It was like, "I believe that everybody can get a job," she just talking about homeless people. Because we were saying like, "Oh yeah, like not everybody has the resources," and she said, "No, I believe everybody can do it because I came here. I'm Mexican, like I came here." I was like, bro. And I bought the Black sounding name thing and the generational wealth, and I was like, "Dude, like not only the generational thing, but you're white passing. We don't have that. Like we can't change our name or change our accent. We're Black. And we get discriminated against. So don't pretend like this shit is just, you can pull yourself--" It was the bootstraps theory. And that's what Al Cannon's trying to say. And I was like, no, so I called him out and I think I got a lot of respect from Latisha from that. Cause she was on the call and she was like, "Yeah. You said what you had to say."

MP: Yeah. I mean his bootstraps were pulled up for him.

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MM: Exactly! It's like, especially in the South dude, like you don't feel me. You don't feel me. That's pretty what I had to say. I was like, you don't feel me, but yeah. As far as the police, as a whole, like I said, the gang enhancements all that stuff, the anti-Blackness with the music, loud music thing. Even in Charleston but around the world. It's often always rooted in white supremacy. You even look at the Minneapolis police--this is something I didn't know about until recently. But the Minneapolis police founded--I'd have to look up the actual graphic so I don't misquote it, but I think the founder of it, the first sheriff was in the KKK, there was like a eugenics person who was in the KKK who founded the city. The city was built on so much white supremacy.

I don't know the direct history with Charleston but it's like a runaway slave patrol. I actually do want to dig in and see when they decide, "Well, the slaves are free, fuck. All right, I guess we'll fuck up the East Side and do all this dumb shit." I don't know. The history behind it is like the reason I've gotten so radicalized. It's just, we keep dying and they kill three people a day last year. I think the rate's even higher now. It's not only like, it's predominantly Black and Brown kids, but it's everybody. It's a violence system and it doesn't have to be like that. It's not like in--like our rates compared to anywhere else, other countries, it's absurd, dude. And people don't see that, people argue for pro police, it's like, look at the stats, dude. Like this is a reality, and other countries, their cops don't even have guns. And people will think that "Oh yeah, cops--such a dangerous job." Roofing and like--they're just not in the top ten most dangerous jobs--or they might be top ten but not even top five. It's roofing and like a whole bunch of other shit. The most times that the police get killed is like accidental vehicle collisions. And then, I think three percent of all police killings are from something violent, like a weapon or something.

MP: It's some crazy small statistic.

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MM: Yeah, and then the other ones will be some fish stuff. Anyways, I don't want to dig too deep into specifics, but it's like a lot of times they'll put up this front about what they have to deal with and like all this shit and it's like, yeah, y'all do a lot, but it's a job at the end of the day. It's like, just do your job, dude. That's all we're asking you. And y'all are asking for more power. You're asking for marketing and stuff. We didn't ask for all that shit, we just asked for you to do your job and leave us the fuck alone. That's my ideas about them. And then, like I said, there is support where--I mean, I don't know. I don't even want to--there has to be like some mental health, first responders, something like that. Somebody has to deal with issues like that and obviously need ambulances, stuff like that, but the police just as it is now in the US, it's just so fucked. I'm passionate for it as an abolitionist this point. Still trying to figure out ways to do it. And that's the thing too, is like, there's a lot of abolitionists that are like, "Fuck it. Yeah. Abolish." But they'll be so hard on that, they won't even do the in-between stuff. And they'll be so abolition focused--there's like some abolitionist policies that might look like reform, but they're closer to abolition. Like I think the racial bias audit is an abolitionist thing because it doesn't give more money to cops and it's an independent review so you know what the fuck's going on with the thing. And there's abolitionists who are like, "I don't fuck with the racial bias audit," I was like, "All right, what the fuck are we going to do other than that?" Like, what's the, there's no alternative. So I've had those internal battles with folks. I mean, it is what it is. That work will have to continue for abolition to be possible. Like if we don't have that in-between work and we just protests every other summer, it's not going to move the needle. I challenge those people all the time. If you want to do the work with abolition, let's do it, what are you going to do? What's your next plan?

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MP: I mean, you have to use the tools that you have to make more tools. I think like the city of Charleston police racial bias audit, is that 2015?

MM: They did it, I think it might've been 2016. They finished it, their first implementation report comes out, I think, in the next couple of weeks actually.

MP: Yeah. And I feel like that's great because after that came out, or the first like version of it came out, I feel like more people were like, "Oh, so we have the actual statistics and numbers so we can make a bigger case for defunding and taking those first steps." I feel like we saw a lot--I think after that is when CAJM really started pushing for the North Charleston one, because they were like, if we have these numbers here in Charleston and we know the same thing is happening in North Charleston, but we actually, we have to have the numbers to be able to do anything. Which is insane. But it's a great first step.

MM: Yeah, no, and it was good too because there's a lot of shortcomings with it. They were now able to analyze and use for the North Charleston--even in our meeting, I was like, "What's something that y'all wish you could have done? Like number one thing you wish you could have done but didn't do for the Charleston one?" And she was like this, this coalition. And I was like, all right, bet. Let's get the meeting going, felt really good to me because I was like, damn, this is what you wanted. What was I about to say--oh yeah. So there's some shortcomings with it, and also a difference between that one and the North Charleston one is that CNA, the company that's doing the audit, is doing the implementation. So it makes it, in my eyes--Charleston's audit was independent, their limitation was then--because Wendy, who works, like the chief is her boss. So the implementation, it hasn't been independent because at the end of the day, she has to answer to him. Versus CNA.

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When they're doing the audit with North Charleston, they answer to the city at the end of day, which also has its shortcomings, but at same time, it's independent from the police. Like they don't have to talk to the police about the implementation. I mean, they do obviously, because you know, it's implemented through them, but at the end of the day, the person doing the implementation, their boss isn't the chief. Yeah, exactly. So it's like, you know, it's different. So I'm excited about it and I think we'll be able to hold them to the fire a little bit more because I feel like Wendy has backed down with the chief, like she like uses the chief as like--she says that shit a lot. And I'm like, "It's your audit! Like do this shit." I've had my own tiffs, you know, butting heads with Wendy but we're on neutral terms, I guess, I haven't talked to her in a minute. It's definitely--the audit, it's an interesting process, but it's difficult getting people together and getting people to rally around one thing when some people just want to be on the optics and just be out there and, you know, protests are nice. Demonstrations are nice, but the real work needs to be done and it's not pretty sometimes, it's fucking boring. You have to go to an hour meeting and sit down and sometimes people don't want to do that shit. And it's like, I'm sorry, but that work has to be done for this work continue. So I'm just trying to get people to organize around that. It hasn't been easy. Just keeping people organized about it, man. It's been a lot, but we figured it out. I think we've gotten better and this has definitely been a learning experience, but we're figuring it out though. We've got a lot of community support and that's what matters.

MP: People power.

MP: Yeah. Yup.

MP: Great. Something else I haven't asked you anything about is gentrification. I mean, you're working so close with the East Side community and I feel like this is where so much gentrification in the city's happening right now. I feel like everywhere else on the peninsula has

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been really heavily gentrified already, but we can see it happening here every day. So how does gentrification impact or guide the work that you do? Do you do anything?

MM: Yeah, it does a lot. And I think, you know, you actually just reminded me about something because I have to check in with Back to Green real quick.

MP: Oh yeah. Do you want me to pause this?

MM: Nah, I might just write a note to myself: check in on Back to Green, they're about to build a substation, but yeah, that substation.

MP: That connection between policing and gentrification.

MM: Gentrification, yeah, exactly. And there is an intrinsic link, even if you look at the Breonna Taylor case, they were about to gentrify that area. It's just, it's so intrinsic of a link. And then even if you look at what they say on the Facebook page, "these people on the streets," and who those people, those are young, Black teens, they're just having a good time. Fuck off, pretty much, like you would have probably been doing the same shit. But they're definitely linked. It's been gotten worked on in a lot of places, so not only here, North Charleston is actually the number one in the United States, I think. I was just talking to Keith about this recently. His area is getting gentrified.

Oh, AJ Davis, you know him--I didn't even know this, he works at Burke! So I was like in the teacher's lounge, literally like, I shit you not, I was opening up my phone and I had just looked, I wanted to see if I had his number, but I didn't add his Facebook. I was like, "I don't know if I should hit him on Facebook or Instagram," thinking about what to do, about to eat my sandwich, like "Let me eat this sandwich then hit him back, hit him up." He walks through the door! I'm like, "Oh, shit, hey!" He said hey to me and I didn't recognize because he had his mask on. "Oh, what's up! N----, I was literally just about to hit you up." So we chatted it up and I told

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him about the coalition and whatever, just kind of talking and figuring things out. I don't know where I was going with that, but yeah, he was just telling me like, same shit. The area is getting gentrified so heavily and I've had arguments even with my family about this shit because somebody says like gentrification is inevitable, it's like--that's one of my big tiffs with cap--that's a real capitalism type of thing. Like it has always has to get to a certain level, like nice-ass houses. Sometimes low-income housing--like people need still need to live here. You still need people to work in your kitchens, even though they shouldn't be held to only jobs like that. You still need people like that. And Charleston such a food and beverage industry, public transportation is so ass that it's gonna crumble the Black culture too. It's like, y'all fucking profit so much off the Black culture but it's like, y'all don't really appreciate the Black people who are living here, day to day type things.

And that's one of the really disgusting things I've just seen. Even in the movement work is that they love the culture but they just don't love Black people. If we can have that linked--and also too, something else, and this is more on the leftist side, and I push it in our stories: I want y'all to love Black people like y'all hate cops. Cause there's some people who are new to the radical left scene who are like, "Fuck cops," but be forgetting that Black people are struggling. You know, help out Eastside Community Development Center, we do food drives and we've been promoting this shit, asking people to volunteer, but it be crickets. It's like, bro, like don't say, or don't criticize either. Like you can criticize me, but I'm not listening to this shit because you ain't doing shit. If you're doing shit--and the person who critiques me, she does, she does shit. So I'll listen to you, you know what I mean? Even though she might have misunderstood what I do, if you do shit and you're in this community, I'll always listen to you, because you have that reference of like, it's a dangerous and scary world sometimes as an activist. You want all this

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good stuff to happen and you're also doing your own shit. I've had to keep [inaudible] a whole bunch of activists who were like--and I've been able to spread my knowledge to other people. Some people are like, "Oh, I'm so down. I feel like it's so much work," like people have been hitting me up. It's like, "Dude, I feel like you, nobody's perfect." So like I had a real good kind of--one of my home girls at Charles House, she was going through some things and I'm just like, "Yeah, I'm just going to be straight," so I'm glad my own experiences with dealing with the pressure and dealing with like my own issues at the same time, it's like juggling that, I've been able to impart that knowledge on other people. I'm only relatively new to the scene. I've had a lot of experiences just like, dealing with different shit and juggling and figuring things out. I know we've gotten off topic a little bit.

MP: Totally fine.

MM: Yeah, fuck it. No, definitely learned a lot though. I think we were talking about the gentrification. Yeah. But I mean, um,

MP: And if you want to talk more, too, about how policing and gentrification are linked?

MM: Yeah, no, definitely. They definitely are. I mean with the substation at Back to Green, that's one of the biggest things. There is crime problems, but it's the poverty problem, like that's the main thing. It's like, y'all, aren't doing the poverty problem. There's a lot of other small shit, and not even small, it's important to the community. The housing authority did a survey and they're like, what are the three things that are most important to you? And I shit you not, it was in this order: flooding, the bugs, and the shootings. Shootings were third on the list of the shit that they really cared about and the city hasn't done to address the top two. There's still bugs, I went in there, I was out there like a couple of weeks ago, still bug-infested. The waste is bad. I think waste is the fourth one. The city wants to make these quick fixes but not the ones that the people

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are asking for. So it's like, they're intrinsically linked and the city just does what the fuck they want for all these developers to come in, just do the fuck they want. And then we see at the city council meetings, I sit through them all the time and it's just like, bullshit, because they continuously do it. And like I said, the over-policing of areas.

And there's some old community leaders--and that's why another reason why I'll never be an old politician, because these old Black men are like, "Oh, we want more police," and they'll be asking for this shit. It's like, "Fuck you, dude," there's Black kids, Black youth, who are going to be affected by this shit. You're going to be fine, you're an old Black gentleman, they're not going to wrap you up, but they're going to throw my ass on the fucking ground. On some other shit. I saw this--it was not a funny graph, it was ironic, because it was a news story about them building a new substation when it first came out. The story was that they did it to increase public safety. So I remember this vision like yesterday. You know how the headline's on the bottom? And it was like, "New Substation to Increase Public Safety," and then in the video, it was like a SWAT team of AK47s going into the hood. I was like, "How the fuck is this safe? What is going on?" Just that disconnect. What? Is this safe to you? Does this look like safety? Like kids looking at this every day, does that look safe to you? Being in a militarized zone? I don't know, dude. It's just like a lot of shit. A lot of like, you know, just like fuck shit, dude. I mean, they're intrinsically linked.

Side note about like other ways gentrification--like with the roads up in Mount Pleasant, with the Phillips community and the Six Mile community and Seven Mile community, that big road, they've already taken so much space. That road's gotten so much overdeveloped since they've been there. And I'm mad as hell because I didn't get to speak when I wanted to because I signed up for the wrong thing I think. But they were like, "Boom, like, does anyone want to

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speaking on this or saying something," or no, it was the councilmember or whatever and a dude came out. So all the Black people came up and made their statement like, "What the fuck is going on? Stop this shit," and I don't even think it was the Phillips community, it was a different community, but similar issue. It was the developer. He was like, "This is not a race thing," and he's a white dude, and I really wish I could've said something. In my head though I was like, "They love to make it not a race when it's something that benefits Black people." You can't withdraw the race card. You invented the race card! Whiteness has not always been--I mean, you do your history, but whiteness has not always been, it used to be nationalities and in Europe it's still like people looking at themselves like, "I'm Italian. I'm not--" but the invention of whiteness and I know I was going somewhere with this.

MP: Um, race card, developer?

MM: Yeah, like y'all created this shit. And I feel like I see it all the time, dude. Even with the police shootings and stuff, the race card was invented by y'all, we are retrieving it, using it because we have the facts. I had to pull away from, even like when people say I'm using the race card, it's like, it's about race. If it's race-related between two races, it's about race. So it's like, you can't take that away, and I feel like with gentrification, a lot of people like to do that. Because you can be a Black person gentrifying a neighborhood too, but at the same time, I don't know. A lot of people try to be like, "I don't see color," when it suits them and I've been really good at calling that shit out.

And it's the same thing with the All-Lives Matter thing. Somebody said that shit recently and that shit always irks me every time somebody says this shit. Because we didn't say that all lives didn't matter, but I don't want to have that argument. We agree that all lives do matter, but Black lives--anyways, you know this. The one time somebody said it and I didn't say shit, I was

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in jail so I was like, "Hey, whatever," I just left it at that. The last time somebody said it, it was an Uber driver, and I still didn't say shit, because it was an old Black lady. She said at the end, she's like, "Well, all lives matter." Charlie's ass was the one who introduced me. I punched Charlie after, I was like, "That's why I don't ask you to introduce me as that--" as the Charleston Black Lives Matter thing. She didn't really say anything after, just, "Oh, that's nice," and then at the end she said, "All lives matter," and I was like, "Man."

And that's why I don't like getting introduced and why I don't like doing Uber drivers because you never know who the fuck's in your car. No, not trying to do that. I just do Uber Eats because I'm fine with that. Like I said, "Aren't you?" Nope, nope, nope, get out my car, the trip is over. Yeah, especially because I'm not trying to have--if I had like a kid in my car who was saying some dumb, trying to have a real philosophical conversation with me about shit, but was on some stupid shit, I'd be like, "Yeah, I'm just going to end this trip, sorry. Like I can't." And especially also for my safety too, like I don't want--if somebody tries like, you know--I'll smoke you get in my car and then drop your ass off and tell Uber about it. Like leave me alone. Not to say I'm like a tough guy, but I have to protect myself and you're behind me. Definitely that's why I don't do Uber. And that's why I don't like even announce myself, depending on like the crowd. Like, "This is what I do. I do the activist work." I say all of that to say sometimes, especially nowadays, being in the BLM puts a target on your back. I've even--people will even try to associate us with the global foundation. And I was like, "Don't have shit to do with--like we're an independent chapter." So it's definitely been something that I've had to learn about, learn just how to react to different folks.

Sometimes I can't fight everybody, dude. If you think it's this type of way, it's only so much I can teach you. You're going to have to do the research yourself because this shit's

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happening. I can't explain this shit to you. You know what I mean? Like I can, but look around you! I guess kind of one of my last little points on the gentrification-policing thing: you saw it in Gonzales Gardens, this project in Columbia, had a substation, same thing. Right after that, it's torn down now so they could build up and gentrify the fuck out of it. Tore down the Church's Chicken that was right there. But anyways, it's an intrinsic link, especially with Back to Green, I think it's like the number one example. It was only the housing authority who asked for it, not the people. Only like a certain amount, like older gentlemen asked for this shit, so it didn't get the full community voice. Now it's just going through, just because it's one of those easy things you can obviously push, it's like, "Oh, police substation. Oh, we'd love that." They give them more money.

The police are so fucking--their budgets. In every city, I think it's the number one thing, it always sucks up so much resource from the actual, the people who need the money. And that's why people trip when we say defund the police. It's like, "Bro, like they have so much fucking money, dude, and people are still poor." And they criminalize poverty. So, it's like, what you got going on, dude? I don't know how to explain this to you; the resources be limited. The resource has to come from somebody. "Won't that make it harder to do their job?" I think it's like less than twelve percent of their calls are for violent crimes. It's twelve, what the fuck? The rest of this shit is bullshit or it could be done through other means. Like with the traffic stops, like they don't need to be doing all this shit. It's always been forever predators. When was it radically changed? It has never been radically changed. They'll throw a police camera on, turn it off when they do some dumb shit. Even with the Adam Toledo thing, they're like, "All right, cameras off, cameras off." They put millions and millions--the city just paid for some cameras for the police

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department. And we see so much shit on camera and we're tired of this shit. We saw Walter Scott on camera, we didn't even need the body cam. Shit's fucked up.

MP: You can take such a small percentage of the police's huge budget and put it in so many places. Defending--it doesn't have to mean anything. And I think that's where there's a lot of contention with it because people don't quite understand. But I agree, like you're saying, poverty is criminalized, Blackness is criminalized. But when you give the police that much resources, they're going to make it their job to just remove people that they don't want to be here. And it's happening. It's happening.

MM: Yeah. But we'll figure it out though. It's a long battle, but I'm in it to win it. Got to do something about it. But I'm glad I'm young and I feel like that's what a lot of people fuck with and the old heads respects me for it just cause they're like, "I was young, your age. Like I'm not that way anymore. I'm old. I'm not as radical as I--" actually there's some old folks who are still radical. I didn't know this, but I had a Black Panther, like an O.G., like I didn't even know Columbia had a Black Panther Party, but it had a Black Panther org., and apparently they got bombed. They had gone to a rally; it was after King got assassinated. They went to organize somewhere and then when they got back, the FBI pretty much raided their shit, blew up their shit. Yeah, damn, how the fuck did I not know this shit about Colombia? So, she was like, "Yeah, we were just grassroots organizers, we were small, but we had headquarters and all that," and I was like, "Damn, that's hard as fuck." She was on our meetings; she was a real one in our meetings. She was on point, just being on some real shit. She lives out in North Charleston too.

Looking back on that coalition, it was so diverse and just on point, like with people who were like bad about it. Like she was an old head, obviously because she was with the Panthers, she was around when King was assassinated. And I can't even imagine being alive in that era and

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hearing that news, like what the fuck? I can't even imagine how that would feel. Because he's always been that in our lives so we always immortalized him, and sometimes not in the right way, but you know, he was a human being, somebody just taken from the community, who is both idolized and hated sometimes. I feel like the whole--at least from what she was telling me, everybody was like, "What the fuck, dude?" Especially the way it happened. And the way Malcom X died, it was obviously riots too, but a little different because it was Nation of Islam who was initially blamed for it. But if you look at it, I don't know if you saw, but the cop that they arrested, his body guard or some shit--a lot of people were saying the police had a hand in his murder. And I don't doubt that at all because the police--and that's another reason why I'm such an abolitionist because I've learned about what they did with Fred Hampton. I don't know if you've seen the *Judas and the Black Messiah* movie, the stuff they did with Fred Hampton, the [inaudible] program.

And one of the old heads tried to school me about this--I know about this shit! I don't want to talk over the phone too much. It's just, it's real bro. They've established all these things. And even today, they clock my Instagram and I have to be cautious about--I don't know, I don't think they'd try to maul me, but they've done that in organizations and they spread false news. And this wouldn't be police, it'd be more like FBI, CIA. You know, decentralize organizations, because they've done it before. I don't doubt that they'd do it again or that they're continuously doing it. Even with the shit with the Patrisse Cullors thing, like they're saying it's a right wing thing but I don't know who started this, it could easily be a government program. I've been clocking it, just trying to, like I said--and that's another reason I'm against being a politician too early. I'm not jumping at it like people, "You should do this," nah, I'm not. I'm good in there at

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least for now. Also, I don't want it to seem like I'm just in it so I could get a political position because I feel like I'd also get that like, "Oh. You just started--" No, I don't give a fuck about this.

But especially if the East Side asked me--because City Councilmember Mitchell is looking to groom somebody, like we'll check and see. Like, you know, I rock with it, and if I did do it, it would probably be something like that, like be a city councilmember. But at the same time, I don't know. Like I said, it'd be difficult, man; you got to time it right. Gotta be the right time. Gotta have the right person, gotta have the right relationship with the community. That's important too. I think it's tough, especially if you don't already have that connection with the community. I feel like it wouldn't be tough for me because the East Side's like family, a lot of people around here fuck with me real heavy. Even the kids, like I was just up in Burke and, "Oh yeah, I see you around all the time." I pulled up to Martin Park recently, or not Martin Park, Philip Simmons Park. I just like randomly just pulled up and dropped off food. We'll have a food event at Martin Park sometimes. I just like pull up, pass out food. That's how they know me sometimes, as the random pull up person. Other times I'll pull up with flyers and be like, "We have a financial literacy class!" A little something different, but I think I've done a good--I feel like if I ran, I'd get a lot of people to fuck with me. A lot of people that would be in my corner, but like I said, it'd be something I'd think about later.

MP: All right, last question I'm going to ask you, I don't want to take up your whole day.

MM: It's all good.

MP: What do you envision for the future of Charleston or the future of the East Side?

MM: Well, it could go a couple different ways. I think somebody from--I'll give the counter of what I don't want to see. One of the old heads is like, "Yeah, man," because I was passing out my real estate financial literacy center, and he's like O.G. actually. He's real tight

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with Latonya, used to be in the streets, but just respect in the streets, and now he's old, old head, like actual old head. So can't really do shit now, but anyways, he was talking, "Yeah man, this city is about to be like the Rainbow Row about to be everywhere." Pretty much like the suburbs, whitey town, I think that was the term he used. I was like, "Damn, bro, don't tell me that! I'm young, I still got to live here, bro." So just telling him about this shit. But I think we're at a pivotal point with it.

As long as I'm here, I'm going to continuously fight for shit but it obviously has to be bigger than me. And it is bigger than me obviously. But counterexample for what he's thinking, I think Charleston, it'll either have to or it'll just be a racial divide, and there already is because a lot of Black folks have already moved up North Charleston. But I think there'll be a couple more focal points. It's like, all right, we won't let this go. And I think one of the bigger ones that I see coming up is when they try to tear down Back to Green, because I could easily see them doing that soon. I think that the long-term strategy is one, stop them from--because what they'll do is they'll trying to do it as a rag. So they'll just sell it off to a company and the company will make mixed use housing, which is pretty much move all the Black people out. The shit that pissed me off about this is because they will say they will have mixed use and a percentage of affordable housing, quote, unquote, but me and Latonya beat them on the affordable housing. The rent for this shit was more than I pay in my normal house. And I was like, "Bro, how the fuck?" It was like supposed to be--it was literally more than I pay. I live in an apartment, like you've been to my apartment. How the fuck is this shit affordable? And I know it's not public housing but if you're going to say affordable, make it actually. It's just tripping. If I can't afford this shit, imagine somebody, like a family of four, people that are going through some shit. So yeah, they definitely throw that word around.

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But anyways, like I said, I think that will be one of the focal points. I think if we can save Back to Green and just have it continuously be like a Black hub, like it is now, and save the East Side, those apartments, if we can save that, then I think we'll be good. Those would be the focal points. If we can say these places--or not save them, but just enforce something to stop the predatory lending and stuff going on. If we don't, it's just going to continue to happen, especially in Charleston. And you can see just so visibly here. Like those new spots by Martin Park, those big apartment buildings and shit off of Meeting Street. Within the four years, six years we've been living here, it's just changed so much. As far as the future, I think taking those focal points and like, "No, we're not going to take this shit anymore. This is where we draw the line," and then that's going to be the only thing that's going to like, "All right, our foot's in the sand about this shit." There'll be some key moments like that.

I think there'll always be a Black identity, with the Gullah identity here, I think that that'll never go away. I think the Black culture will continue to be celebrated, but I think we'll have more ownership of it as generations go on. I think, especially the International African American Museum, I think that would be a cool focal place for it. The history has always been here. The Black folks will still always be here, still holding it down, but I think we're going to get more gentrified. But they're going to try to take something or there's going to be one building they're going to take down, and it's like, "All right. Y'all are going too far with this shit." It is going to take a couple more focal points, but I think it's part of the future.

I think continuously that there'll be the white folks in the Battery will still be there, and there will still be all-white neighborhoods. So there will still be some segregation, but thinking like the historically Black neighborhoods here, I think there's a future and it's going to be tough. Just like those fights that I'm talking about as far as the small places that have to lead to the

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preservation of it, and protection of the people who've been living here. I think it just takes time. But the culture here is so deep and so rich, I think it'll go through its own innovations and fluctuations. The Black people here, we're warriors, we're strong. The Gullah culture here is so strong. I think there's a future. It is going to take some continuous fighting. I think we've got a good future here.

MP: That's good. Well, let's end on a positive note unless you have any other final thoughts or feelings you want to share.

MM: No, that's about it.

MP: Well, thank you! I'm going to go ahead and turn this off, try to turn this off. Excuse me Chicken, excuse me.

End of recording.

Transcription by Mills Pennebaker

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