

## Thought on Tap - May 13th - Building Legacies of Economic Empowerment

**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Okay, welcome everyone to Thought on Tap, this is a program that is brought to you by the Core Humanities program, Laughing Planet, and the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Nevada, Reno. My name is Caitlin early, I'm an assistant professor of art history, and one of the co-organizers for Thought on Tap.

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This is our last session of our third season, which has been held entirely online. If you're new to thought on top, we are a public engagement series that brings together a diverse faculty, staff, students and community members for important conversations around timely topics. We host events on the second Thursday of every month during the fall and spring semesters. We hope you'll join us again next year, when our series continues.

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Our theme for this academic year is legacies in the fall. We discussed confronting legacies first of health disparities and October, than a voter suppression in November and finally of policing and violence in December. In the spring, we're focusing on building legacies. So we've looked at equity in education, health and healing activism and social justice, and economic empowerment, which is our subject for tonight. You can find our past broadcasts on our YouTube channel and on our website. Just search for thought on tap at us or for tonight our program runs until 630, I will start things off with an introduction to our topic, then I will introduce you to our panelists,

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and then I'll post some initial questions to get the conversation started. We really hope you'll chime in, in the q and a. We'd like this to be as much of a conversation as possible so throughout the event, feel free to leave your questions in the q and a box at the bottom of your screen. And I'll address your questions as they come in. Now, on to tonight's topic. Tonight's topic is building legacies of economic empowerment, and I was, as I was sitting down to put together this introduction.

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The only thing I could think of was it has been a year, especially here in Nevada. Like many places, Northern Nevada has seen a host of changes as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Many of them economic nationally preliminary data suggests the

pandemic has increased wealth inequality and low income populations have borne the brunt of the costs. Economists at the Brookings Institution have even seen a decline in intergenerational economic mobility, suggesting this period of compression instability and widespread for clarity will have long lasting effects in Reno we face our own specific challenges.

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And we do have some good news here: forecasts from Nevada's Economic Forum suggest a quicker than expected economic recovery, Northern Nevada and particularly diversified its economy, after the Great Recession of 2008, which may account for greater resilience in the face of the pandemic. So we face a number of problems, housing costs keep going up for instance with the median home price and the Reno Sparks area reaching almost \$500,000 and by late 2020 up 16.8% just in the last year.

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Houselessness is increasing in northern Nevada, a trend that began before the pandemic. Although the Nevada cares campus opens officially next week, and can host up to 900 people, many problems remain in terms of how to house and care for our communities, budget cuts and decreases in revenue in the meantime have effective nonprofits, arts organizations and educational institutions alike. Now is a good time to ask them what's ahead in Nevada's economic future.

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How can we support local communities and youth in Reno, how can we address housing prosperity, and what policies and practices can help Reno move toward a more stable economic future. Our panelists tonight bring a host of expertise and a wide range of experiences to this issue and I'm so excited to introduce them. I don't expect them to answer all of these questions. I know that we're covering a pretty wide topic tonight, but I'm really excited to hear what everyone has to say.

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So first I'd like to introduce Donald Griffin and RoMar Tolero or they are co founders of Black Wall Street Reno, a nonprofit organization that works to meet the needs of black and other underserved minorities and the Reno Sparks area through community resources, leadership development and peer support. Thank you so much to you both for joining us.

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Next I'll introduce Nico Colombant, who is a veteran foreign correspondent multimedia short and long form storyteller and hyper local community website developer at the

Reynolds school of journalism at you and our Nico coordinates the Reynolds Media Lab and runs our town Reno, a collective multimedia street recording project. Our Town Reno reports on issues of poverty, homelessness and the lack of affordable housing gentrification displacement and street art, and the biggest little city. Thanks for being here Nico.

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Next I'll introduce Chris Wagner, who is a freelance arts and culture journalist and the editor of double scoop Nevada's online visual arts magazine. Chris has earned awards for critical writing entertainment writing features writing and somehow sports writing. Learn more at [www.dochrisvagner.com](http://www.dochrisvagner.com), Chris, thanks so much for joining us.

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Okay. So with that, I'd love to get this conversation started. I know we have a lot of things that we could potentially talk about, and I want to start today and I hope you'll forgive me. I am a professor and I'm going to ask you kind of a professor a question to get us started, but I think it might help us all get on the same page in terms of what we're thinking about, and here's my question for you all. And what does economic empowerment mean to you? So that's in the title of our program tonight. So when I say economic empowerment when I first contacted you about economic empowerment.

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What does that mean, can I could anyone want to get us started with that.

### **Donald Griffin**

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I thank you for having black Wall Street on this is Donald Griffin. That looks to me as something that is not passed down through generations in our black culture. We don't know what that generational wealth behind looks like. So I think we're so much as a squirrel trying to get a net and hold on to that. So what it looks like to us. Wall Street, Miss providing the financial legend in classes.

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Real Estate classes things that are not taught to us that I feel that other people in society have the upper hand on. So it's generational wealth and leaving that legacy of how to manage your money not just budgeted but leave something behind for your kids, and not try to take it all with you. Thank you.

### **RoMar Tolliver**

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Just kind of add to that yeah like seeing generational wealth. Being able to position the next generation or your family to succeed further in society, and accomplishing their dreams. A lot of inner city black in the underserved are not set up in a position to actually have a springboard to catapult into their dreams so the economic world is kind of like passing the baton in a relay race, you know, to be able to further those goals in life.

### **Kris Vagner**

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Yeah, I agree with you guys I think what economic empowerment would look like to me would be a lot less wealth disparity of every kind. And you know how to achieve that is a bigger question but there's a short answer for you.

### **Nico Colombant**

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Yeah, I agree with all the panelists so far just to add to that, I wasn't ready for this question, but I just scribbled a few notes. I would say you know access to safety, access to healthy food and access to a good education. I believe could be a springboard, as you mentioned, to economic empowerment, which is so crucial.

### **Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Awesome, thanks Nico and yeah sorry to blindsides you with my with my professor question to get started. Yeah, so what I'm hearing is that economic empowerment is partly about money and wealth, but it's also about skills and it's also about the ability to transform the way we exist in the world and potentially pass that on to future generations. I love this idea of passing the baton. With that in mind, if we kind of have our goal in sight. What do you see as the biggest economic issues facing the Reno community right now? This could be your community, communities you've worked with or people you've spoken to.

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I know you all bring a wide range of expertise and experiences to this. So yeah, what is happening, What are our biggest economic issues that we're facing today.

## **Donald Griffin**

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I feel like our biggest gap is that they're playing Monopoly and we don't know the rules to it. What's happening right in front of us is that those rules haven't been passed down and when they are passed down some way is knocked out of our hands and taken away from our grip. And then we're told to bring ourselves up by our own bootstraps which we don't even have any books anymore; they're more like sandals.

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And I believe that is, we're at a deficit in the way that we think we don't know how to play this game, and we're so focused on fast cars, money women that what you see on TV, and that's where we live off of that's what we base wealth off of. We don't understand that there's a difference between being rich and being wealthy rich people think about money, wealthy people come up with a plan says average the next generation, and I feel that we have as leaders throughout the community have to

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set those examples that when you walk into your own restaurant you start to see black faces. There is not a place that you can go in the restaurant and see a generation that got led up to this actual building. You'll see your own leaders, you don't even know when you war heroes that are black. So we have to start generating those thoughts into their mind that as black leaders and then we are people, it didn't start with slavery.

## **Kris Vagner**

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And it's like absolutely Donald and I think it's really important to make sure that everyone in the community understands that. That's not a matter of happenstance like that level of disparity, that was written into laws like that was written into discriminatory housing laws for a very long time. And I think part of fixing that is like we look that straight in the eye and say like, you know, look at how hard we messed this up.

## **RoMar Tolliver**

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Yeah. What you're just saying, Chris. Understanding generational wealth and money as a system, and not just paper token for you know like a hall pass you get a paycheck and now you can do what you want to do. Understanding money as a system in a way of maintaining a lifestyle type of thing. And just sharing. Sharing the wellness, the

awareness as hosting these financial classes have even put a spin in understanding on how I live in value and money itself. So yeah just understanding the system of money.

### **Nico Colombant**

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And to add to all of that, I would add the concept of that we're in a living wage crisis. So with Our Town Reno, our reporters interview people who are struggling, who might not even have stable shelter. And sometimes, and Donald interacts with a lot of these neighbors we have, you'll have women who are in their 70s, who are disabled, who are on fixed income and that income is \$700- \$800, and they can't afford anything right now. And so, I call that sort of the living wage crisis and to piggyback on the historical notions. I think of the New Deal. That was launched, you know wasn't perfect but that was launched by FDR kind of petered out with Jimmy Carter when this era of neoliberal policies began and continue to this day now with Biden and all these COVID stimulus checks it's kind of, you know,

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changing perhaps. But this whole period, with the New Deal puttering out with all this neoliberalism you know created this income inequality that just keeps growing more and more and more and that Chris alluded to, as well. So I think those are concepts I would like to bring to this discussion.

### **RoMar Tolliver**

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Yeah Nico you hit it on the head with Dan, because a lot of people that are settling for the government are subsidized, whatever it may be. Those are a lot of them with the people in society. I don't understand the financial situation.

### **Nico Colombant**

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And the living wage crisis also encompasses people you know getting salaries and you're seeing that you can't afford an average Reno price, even if you have three jobs at minimum wage. So, that's also part of the living wage crisis, it's not just people on basic income, it's also people working very hard. That that those dollars don't go as far as they used to.

### **RoMar Tolliver**

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For now it takes, it takes like three income households just to maintain the meals and things.

**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Oh yeah, go for it. This is one of the issues that I think has come up in the news in recent weeks with shortages of workers and questions about how good some jobs actually are in terms of whether they are providing a living wage. That's also been an issue here in Reno when we have new tech jobs that are great but are introducing bigger salaries to the area, and local salaries haven't necessarily kept up.

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We also have one of the things, potentially driving housing costs here are people coming in from other states who have sold their homes there for a lot of money, and can then pay a lot of money for housing here, one of the, one of the things I'm hearing from everyone that I that I love to pick up on is this idea and Donald I'm going right back to you but you said you feel like you're playing Monopoly, or people are playing Monopoly and they don't understand the rules.

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And that was really striking to me. And so it sounds like. And from what I've read black Wall Street is doing a lot of financial education and working on teaching people the rules. Should we also change the monopoly though? I mean, is this something where we're changing the rules and trying to change the game and can we do that. Can we do both things at once?

**Donald Griffin**

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No, we don't want to change the day we want to we want to do a better understanding I think you are getting a private school or you look at Damonte Ranch or something they're talking, different they're taught how to actually put their money to use you know they taught the nonprofit and it taught it different between the nonprofit world and then a profit world we're not taught that we're not taught any way but just how to go out and spend it on Nike's, and that's a lot to do with the medium, and I didn't know anything about credit into I hit 37 when I got sober I had no idea.

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I'm still wondering about that I have no idea how, not just live with their needs, how to buy a house, how to add up the credit and that way the interest doesn't hit me so hard and be able to pay it off in three payments, instead of taking 20 payments and pay it off and still charging interest. So that's where we're at. Hopefully I answered your questions.

**RoMar Tolliver**

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I think the rules, the rules and the structure of the game needs to be changed because there's a lot of profit is being made, am I saying the wealth gap is so enormous that it doesn't make any sense whatsoever in any sound mathematical problem you should allocate to the bottom to kind of balance things out, or the structures level to tip over.

**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Yeah, for sure. So, potentially changing both the structure but also educating within that structure to give people the tools that they need to, to navigate in that line of thinking, what are some ways that you see people working toward economic empowerment in Reno? I know there's a lot going on in our communities that is helping to drive a movement toward economic empowerment for various communities.

**RoMar Tolliver**

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Some things we would like to do is start some small investment groups and study groups like that to where we can invest in capital in assets and things that we don't appreciate and just understand the difference between liabilities and assets and, you know, debt, and things of that nature. So just understanding the rules of the game, more so than just what you can do with some money, what you can buy with money but actually how to generate and maintain and understanding profits and percentages.

**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Nico and Chris What about you all, do you see people working toward economic empowerment in communities that you work with?



## Nico Colombant

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Well, I would like to see much more done on the lower end of housing so you have a city council officials you know elected and other always you know talking badly about motels they'll say, oh, there's a lot of drug dealing, there's a lot of prostitution going on in motels. And there's a lot of drugs and sex trafficking going on with wealthy people but you don't hear them talk about that, and they just demonize motels, and they want to sort of eliminate motels they call them blight and back, you know,

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a century ago you had what were called flop houses where you could stay for \$5 a night. The name is not very good, but we could have micro hotels, we could have, you know, we could call them bunk houses. They're called Single single residency occupancy. We could have so much on the scale that is more accessible to people. We could even go lower. We could have safe parking lots for people who live in RVs, we can legalize it.

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We could have, Oregon has done you know homeless huts. I just posted on the Our Town Reno Instagram the tiny 10 tiny home village, the houses are now going for \$300,000 for 700 square feet, who can afford that. That's what they call a tiny home in Reno right now. So we just, and a lot of programs in Reno are trying to help our excellent, excellent but they start on such a small scale.

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We need some big nonprofits to come in to do these on a bigger scale or we need to believe in ourselves that we have to make housing more accessible, more affordable, and not just always cater to luxury brands or luxury student housing. We just did an article about students struggling with housing and having to live further and further away from UNR. There was this huge issue in Reno a few years ago about granny pods, and people made fun of granny pods, that's building something on your own yard on

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your own property, a lot of people already do it illegally Anyway, why not legalize that there was all this nimbyism about that, and that didn't pass and people ridiculed it, but I would, you know, advocate for trying more solutions for more accessible housing because housing is a huge issue. It takes up so much of people's incomes and it reduces that economic empowerment, when you're barely swimming staying afloat you just cannot empower yourself.

## **Donald Griffin**

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Yeah, I do. Go ahead.

## **Kris Vagner**

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Oh, it's just it's so concerning to me how much we hear about, you know, economic development and building and luxury student housing keeps coming to my mind like there are so many students struggling like we're not talking about them very much. And we're just not hearing a lot of conversations about a really strong impetus to take care of our own and take care of our community and I'm, I, I just, I worry about the way the priorities are going and the way they're there they're even discussed.

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You know, we know all of the reasons to take care of the developers coming into town but we were talking less and less of other reasons too. I don't know if we're talking less I mean our town Reno is doing an amazing job, talking about this every day but I I just, I want to hear more from the people saying like, yeah it's it's what we should do as a community to take care of our own people, to take care of people are struggling.

## **Donald Griffin**

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And there are a lot of people that are struggling along the river banks. And that too is part of economics. I believe that homelessness is a reflection of the way that our society thinks, then it's a cash cow as well. And they're not putting in as much. I rather afford affordable housing, but I have to ask the question affordable for who. And when these people are taken off the river and put into a room, I like to say they're locking that problem away and these people are unable to mentally deal with this new change in their environment.

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And we don't have enough mental health people in place. And I love the people that are graduating, but I was thinking about when I was in mental health, my addiction was older than my teacher and they had no understanding of what it was to get off the river and come be put in what they call affordable housing and have to be put to work and I haven't worked in all these years and I don't know what to do it the paycheck will not

hurt you paid, and they're not, they don't have enough structure in place for the people at the bottom, at all, and mental health is

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my biggest concern with the people along the river.

**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Nico, I see you nodding.

**Nico Colombant**

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Oh no, I just, I always love being on a panel with Donald as I've been on a few with him and I always agree with everything Donald says and I love you know they talk about lived experience, and you know, Donald has that lived experience and so he speaks from a position of expertise. He's getting some new degrees for himself now so I'm just very impressed by his journey and people have complained that the community homelessness Advisory Board does not have anyone currently with lived experience and that

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the Nevada cares campus you know the discussions maybe should have involved, like Donald's saying more of intake from people living along the river, what would you like to see how would you end by making them empowered that way even in just the decision making, making them stakeholders at a certain level I think would be more successful.

**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Yeah, to give some background here so then the data cares campus opens officially on May 17. It's really large right it's, 46,000 square feet. It can host up to 900 people, it has general housing, as well as housing for couples, and for people with pets. So there's a lot of really cool stuff going on with it. It's also been the subject of debate again because it's a question of, you know who are the stakeholders in this right and who who did have input and how this happens and and Donald I think this goes back to what you were bringing up, sorry the lights being weird on my face here, this goes back to what you were bringing up about.

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Is there going to be support for mental health is there going to be support for addiction issues for job training for financial education, and what I'm hearing is that this isn't necessarily an issue where like housing will solve everything, that this is a multi faceted problem and that building economic empowerment requires approaches that that come from a number of different directions.

### **Donald Griffin**

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I believe that there are people from the river to have fourth street, looking well, like Midtown and once their care campus opens, nothing that is a Resource Center for those without homes are going to be available. you can no longer key downtown. So pretty much is that okay we can't force you to go into a place you don't you can be homeless but you won't be homeless in eyesight is what I'm getting from all this stuff that is taking place.

### **Nico Colombant**

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And I think Caitlyn, the opening might be a little bit rushed because everything you're talking about I'm not sure is already. So if someone goes there and they were expecting to bring their pet but it's not ready for that yet, or if the safe camp isn't ready yet or if those wraparound services which are actually I think phase two, aren't ready yet then it can become a problem. I also wanted to introduce the concept of basic income, we heard from Andrew Yang during the election campaign, we sort

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i got a taste of it. During COVID with the stimulus checks. It was sort of a nationwide experiment. Now I think the figure that is given is that Reno Washoe County Northern Nevada got \$17 million. I would say you know there's about 10,000 people in our local population that are really really struggling. Now 17 million divided by 10,000?

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I'm pretty sure all those people can then buy a house. Even at our high prices, and bam you solve the problem for at least this generation. I was an international reporter and I saw a lot of nonprofits trying to navigate and the most effective is when you give money directly to people and they would give it to the market women because they're the smartest and their families on how to manage that budget, and once they had the money they made great decisions on their own terms. So, direct money I think you're

going to maybe get into structural solutions but direct money I think could be part of the solution.

### **Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Yeah, to piggyback on that if we are talking about structural solutions and you go I heard you mentioned that we need some big nonprofits in town to help with this and that made me wonder, Is this something like who works on this is this something that really requires sort of a national level nonprofit or a really big well funded nonprofit, is this coming out of government? Is this a team effort? I mean, what, what, who do we need working on this?

### **Nico Colombant**

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It just needs to start. I mean what you know Black Wall Street Reno is doing is just so amazing. And that's just really two people that we have right here, you know, putting so much heart and soul into that effort. And you know, just building it day by day, day by day putting all their work into it and that's a great example and that's so important.

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I mean there is so much racism in in the in the discussion of economic empowerment that that is the one thing, you know, I give the floor to Black Wall Street Reno for that but that is the one you know dominant thing on economic empowerment definitely because I mentioned the New Deal and that the new deal was extremely racist. So that's why I said you know it was far from perfect, but you know I'm saying, a big nonprofit because, for example, there's a local initiative to do a community land trust

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but you have all these great initiatives locally but they're small scale so it's hard to sort of duplicate and to get bigger, but there's very few actually nonprofits that are totally devoted to housing. And you mentioned housing and I do believe that the housing first model is also something to look closely into where you can skip the shelter and put people straight into housing, and a lot of times addiction, mental health, and other problems actually get helped a lot because of the housing.

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Because when you're outside all day long, you know, it's so hard to cope in those conditions. If you have a house where you can lock your door, you can have your possessions, it's much easier to cope with life, that's just how human nature is.

### **Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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So fixing those basic needs allows people to pursue options that they wouldn't have been able to otherwise and I think that's part of what we're hearing with the term empowerment, right. It's about taking care of certain needs in order to pursue others, Nico, I'm going to follow up on your question to Romer and Donald and could you walk us through some of the things that Black Wall Street Reno is doing.

### **RoMar Tolliver**

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Currently we're hosting weekly meetings, financial forecast meetings, and that's just you know spreading the information of the financial system, getting a bigger perspective and understanding of the monetary system. We also are branching into starting some first time homebuyer classes, we had a young lady reach out and wanted to share some information about that wondering why there's not as many as there should be single mothers applying for home, there's a lot of home buying programs.

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So we're going to start some classes with that as well. Another class we got coming up that I'm excited about is an expungement class. A lot of inner city people struggle with felonies and charges that discourage them from pursuing better jobs in higher paying careers. So with expungement, those are three classes that can help us kind of set some foundational programs to help us elevate in the pursuit of bettering ourselves.

### **Donald Griffin**

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And what we do for the kids is that we're getting them from the comfortability of their own neighborhood so we're connecting with forever 14 suicide prevention we're taking them to zip lining on the 22nd. This month, we're also trying to get 40 Kids within the war zone swag they were connecting with so we can bridge the gap between the black and brown community, and we're going to take them to the Aces ballpark.

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And that's what we're trying to do and just let them know that is bigger and more than just for street, the casinos in school because somewhere along these lines we're losing them in between junior high and high school, so we're trying to bring in, you know, what are your dreams and then you go for your dreams, we help apply that and help you get you there

**RoMar Tolliver**

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There are in-home libraries, grassroots books, they're supporting us and those efforts helping the kids get in home libraries and get those phones out their hand. You know, the pandemic has kind of exacerbated any little problems that you know kids are dealing with struggling with In homeschooling as well as their parents feeling pressure from being laid off or cut back on their hours. So just providing some more resources and opportunities to empower the community.

**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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And it sounds like a community as well, right, peer support network?

**RoMar Tolliver**

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We're trying to get people from all levels of a community involved from the seniors to the students at you and our, as well as engaged in some elementary and middle school activities as well.

**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Awesome. This sounds like there's so many great programs and things going on with Black Wall Street thank you for sharing that. Okay, I have a question for Chris because and this is something I'm thinking about because we're talking about the aces bulk cart, or ballpark and we're talking about grassroots books, and that makes me think about the arts and Chris I know that you specialize

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in all things arts and my question for you is, how do you see the arts contributing to economic empowerment in Reno?

## Kris Vagner

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So there isn't really a you know an overall model or an overall plan. And I think it's difficult to see the future, but I think you know artists as a community generally are interested in community cohesion and they're interested in, like, issues like economic empowerment. It's tricky because there aren't enough. I don't think anyone sees a specific specific course, but you see a lot of individuals doing what they can, you know, coming up with ways that one single individual can contribute to this.

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for example, there's one. There's a anonymous yarn bomber named, she goes by the handle yarn girl who decided, like look I can't, you know, can't control the system like the way that I'm going to participate is I'm just going to have a sale I'm going to sell a little bit of work she sold some stickers. And I'm going to take that money and give that money directly. I'm going to send it to the mother of black teenager from another state, who was killed by the police like artists are likely to.

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You see this a lot like that to take matters into their own hands and to kind of go around the system and just come up with a creative direct part of a solution that's that's the trend I'm seeing lately, and and you know as far as how institutions are And you know as far as how institutions are dealing with that, it's a much slower harder process to go through and I think we've seen all all year institutions kind of grappling with these, like art, art museums arts institutions grappling with these,

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these legacies of like these racist past with like the whole notion of going to another country and collecting their art that's what museums are like, originally built on. And, and they've kind of always, I feel that people with the public are always suddenly going yeah that's unfortunate that's how it works. and this year the public said, Forget it. We're just not patient with this anymore. We're going to bring museums to task, we're going to bring cultural institutions to task and we're going to make them answer for this.

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So I think we are starting to see, you know, those big institutional changes that are harder and slower like that, this was the year when I started this year actually starting to happen.



**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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So it sounds like institutions, especially arts institutions are participating or paying attention to a lot of factors happening around them, both economic factors and social justice movements. And that a lot of that change feels like it's snowballing?

**Kris Vagner**

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Snowballing might be a little bit strong of a word, but as you know, there's always been this problem, like many cultural institutions, especially the larger older ones. They're built on values of exclusivity right in some way or another, they're built on on value the values basically of the wealthy class and and a lot of these a lot of institutions now we're saying like, whoo let's you know it's our responsibility to welcome everyone and to

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for everyone, and that's a long transition, even if you're trying really hard and giving everything you've got. And different institutions are doing a great job somewhere saying they're doing great jobs and they're not, it's a whole big conversation so I don't want to say that it's, you know, the problem is solved.

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But I do want to say that the public has decided that arts institutions and cultural institutions will be held accountable for this more than they used to be. That's, I think that's where it's at.

**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Do you see in, in, and I think you speak to so many artists and arts organizations that I think in some ways you might have more of a bird's eye view than many of us and my, I wonder whether the arts are being considered in long term economic planning in Reno?

**Kris Vagner**

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I just see is, yeah the city thinks about art and are planning city has long term plans for like public art and Neighborhood Development and the city of Reno for city this size, actually does put a lot of effort into supporting the arts like you won't see you won't see

a lot of cities this size with like expanding public art programs like we have now and you won't see a lot of cities this size.

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That actually grants funds directly from the city government to arts organizations, and to artists like that. That's kind of special for places big that's the feeling, the city is on it to a large degree.

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**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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That's good to know. I think I want to get to some of these structural issues and this goes back to our monopoly question, but one of our many of the economic issues that we're seeing Nevadans face right now are the result of structural problems. And my question for all of my panelists, is what temporary solutions are being offered and what structural changes do you think are necessary?

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**Donald Griffin**

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Temporary solutions, is this that we're right there just temporary, and I don't think they have I think this, the whole momentum of getting this character campus up and running is moving way too fast, man like the second wave is offering the resources that we need so I just know that is what they're doing is is temporary and just to get the people out of sight, the structures as are going up there new casinos are is going to make it more expensive where we can afford it is hard really hard for them

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to get a job as of now, but this is to think about the deficit of people who are at the bottom of the face. If they still have evictions on their records if they're still dealing with any felonies, that is going to be that much harder to get out of this situation they're in. So that's my opinion on it.

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**RoMar Tolliver**

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I think there just needs to be more programs to help the community be self-sufficient and self-sustaining, whether that be career training programs, gig card reentry programs back in the school vocational school, you know, things of that nature.

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Just where there's more hands on like you saying before, are feeling like they need to take some kind of initiative to help and whether there's opportunity and resources for programs where they can get hands on creative and develop things which the community can benefit from or developing programs in which skills can be developed that the community can build on.

### **Nico Colombant**

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And I would go back to the idea of guaranteed basic income, which I think is an important concept that we're sort of experimenting with, with the stimulus checks. There's a lot of cities that are experimenting with it but Reno is not. We're going to hit some very scary times with the end of the moratorium on evictions, which is going to happen in September, that's also about the same time when the more generous than usual unemployment benefits will be running out.

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So those two combined is huge and very alarming to me right now that that's up ahead. So, I just wanted to point out that we are actually experimenting with the stimulus checks with this basic income and I think that should be looked at, very carefully, both on local and national levels.

### **Donald Griffin**

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I think that goal is to say where you know that would say if you gave everybody in the world a million dollars and go right back to the rich people. You know the saying you know everybody be broke who was broke before they had a million dollars so that is legal, you just hit something that makes sense that everybody's going to be stuck in their addiction and doing the same identical thing before they had stimulus check, and once it runs out, is all designed to keep you right where you were at.

### **RoMar Tolliver**

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The curse of the lottery is that, like all the lottery winners 10 years later, you know they're still broke, homeless, no financial understanding goes back down to the information being spread and opportunities, you know, being aware of the opportunities and the information.

**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Yeah, so I'm hearing about you know there might be structural changes in terms of some sort of universal basic income. Government solutions to these sorts of things but it also comes down to education and resources at the community level in terms of how to deal with any structural changes that might be implemented.

**Nico Colombant**

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But who typically offers education, isn't that the government as well. public school?

**RoMar Tolliver**

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I was watching a documentary, where they were saying that a lot of the students were graduating with student debt. They didn't want to buy a house or, you know, they'd rather travel. And as kind of like, I don't know, going into debt and more I guess to travel type of thing. The financial being attached to everything in society so you kind of have a balance within that is what balances everything else out.

**Nico Colombant**

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No, I agree with the importance of financial literacy you know I'm not just saying that throw these things out on their own, of course, you have to do it very carefully but yes financial literacy and you find that people who come from a very wealthy families they pass on this knowledge which isn't taught in schools, about how to manage money when to invest when to you know get equity with housing stock market. These lessons are done in wealthy families.

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You know who have generations of this knowledge, and the financial literacy, that component of education is just so important and and and in colleges, you have the, the students being offered credit cards and right next to that table the spring break package to Mexico the travel credit card they go to Mexico, and boom, they're in debt. There you go.

## **Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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And I think this is, this is, I really appreciate your question though Nico about who's doing the educating right because I think that then becomes really important. Is it, is it government level organizations that are educating? Is it a public school thing or is it community organizations? Right. And so, getting communities involved in education seems like a potential strategy for overcoming some of those structural inequities. Some of them are right, like a lot of structural and equities.

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But this is also I mean not to. I'm an art historian right so I make everything about the arts. But there's also makes me think about the potential of the arts and the flourishing arts and culture scene in cities because arts are things that can start conversations that can, I think, bring people together in interesting ways. And I'm thinking, particularly of organizations like the Holland project I'm thinking about groups we have in Reno who are bringing folks together.

## **Kris Vagner**

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Yeah, there's a, there's this, this term place making that I kind of take issue with the term but I like the idea is to get arts into say a neighborhood. And the reason I don't like the term is because, well, you know, before that was a good looking neighborhood, it was still a neighborhood and it was still placed there so people who live there and I kind of don't like the application that you know that that's not valid. But anyway, the concept is cool like you know you get, um, say murals under in like an underpass under, under.

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Not a freeway but kind of a main road, so that in the city is actually devoting a little bit of money to to like getting these paintings out in neighborhoods that aren't tourists neighborhoods that aren't downtown, and they're going to you to see some sort of sense of of place and like sense of community congealing and you do you see you do see like less graffiti on those walls and you do see less trash under that underpass and and you know you do you do hear people saying like I like this this is

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like we've got more identity and that's a really small solution but it's. That is something that arts can do that I think is going pretty well. Can I tell you about an effort toward

economic empowerment that has nothing to do with the arts that I learned about recently that I think is super interesting. I hope it's a trend.

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So, the. Have you guys heard about how the state passed the cannabis lounge bill this legislative session. So there's this new bill saying okay cannabis lounges can be legal. And it's got more steps to go through is not happening yet but it looks like it'll happen. And in this bill, there's some language that I've never seen in legislation before saying, Okay, let's let's deal with like economic justice, let's admit that in

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policing of cannabis before it was legal, we the state. We arrested and criminalized black people at a rate, three, four times so that white people. Okay, so we have policed, you know, and we've also just over police some communities, we're going to admit that. And it's kept being done, but in order to try to take a step to make up for that.

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Okay, we'll put this in this one, law, anybody who wants to apply for a cannabis lounge license, their \$20,000. If you can show us some documentation that, like your community, your neighborhood was adversely affected by these racist policies in the past weekend will give you a 75% discount. And you know, I hope to help people get into this industry.

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So I had to go a little bit farther to like even though the discount is still pretty expensive so the next round of legislation is going to be, how can we get people licenses to sell tiny amounts of cannabis as a pop-up vendor at an event. So, I've never in my life seen the state say let's, let's just try a little bit of economic justice in this one industry. I hope that as a trend, other states are experimenting with it.

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I've seen three examples in New Mexico, Illinois and California. So, you know, why not, why not address that one piece at a time, with every piece of legislation that we do?

**Nico Colombant**

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The legalization of marijuana so far has been taken over by very wealthy white very well connected people they're the ones getting those legal licenses so far. And on the flip side of the legislature there was an effort to have a boosted bill for tenant rights, and

that is dying, the bill is dying right now so rights for tenants, that's something that creates economic empowerment and so that's something at the legislature that I think is unfortunate.

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**RoMar Tolliver**

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It seems like everything is privatizing and controlled for profit, even though. And now they are even ashamed saying what is a good day, like what is a good day. You know what I mean.

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**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

00:51:54

Yeah, I think I'm going back to Nico your point about the kind of Cliff that's happening in September with the end of the eviction moratorium and changes to unemployment benefits. Do you see anything happening on a community wide or city wide or statewide level to address that or is that just something that's happening.

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**Nico Colombant**

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And it's been repeatedly pushed back, but when it's when it ends it's I think it's going to be ugly sadly, and because you have a lot of, you know, sort of ad hoc solutions between landlords and tenants right now, and some tenants are barely holding on some are still getting evicted you know for different reasons that the landlord's find some small landlords are struggling as well.

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So, but it's really going to come to a head at that point. So I think, you know, the or or maybe they're going to kick out a lot of people in the rents are going to go up even higher. So it's scary I think this September deadline is scary but I do think that at the federal level they are very aware of this possibility so who knows.

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**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Yeah, we'll see what comes down the pike federally, I think, on that note, I want to add to Nico you answered this question in the q and a. And I love all your ideas. I want to open it up to all of our panelists though, in case folks didn't have a chance to see it. We

have a question from our audience, which is are there things that people in the community can do to help support local economic empowerment for more people in our community? So what can folks in the community do?

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**RoMar Tolliver**

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For those in the community with the financial knowledge that may work. You know banking institutions or whatnot nation should host classes and seminars to try to, you know, catch the youth coming out of high school and as going into, you know, independent living and having to learn how to budget and and things of that nature prioritize their small income that they do have coming in.

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**Nico Colombant**

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Yeah, I would say volunteer for a session at Black Wall Street Reno and they'll have you come up with the session, and I'm sure you guys will invite them right because that looks like such a cozy space. Such an enriching space, so you know you could start by offering your services for an afternoon to black Wall Street Reno right Donald.

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**Donald Griffin**

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Yes, thank you. Thank you. We have an All recovery session that you might want to hold specially when people get sober you might want to be over eating classes, whatever that you can bring that can take your mind off of whatever hardship that a person is going through we're willing to take. Thank you.

00:54:43

And Kris, I got a question for you so we want to donate items to children so we want one of those big checks May, instead of having money we want to have fulfilling your dreams helping fulfill your dreams and just you know help them. You know when we take donations to help these athletes get to their dreams and we have one just from a no high school, get to the Dallas Cowboys Stadium me know we had a little check form but we want to do and advertise like they do when they giving somebody a car, if you can help with that please let us know.

**Kris Vagner**

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I would love to let's talk, let's talk. Yeah. There's some really good graphic designers in town who are really community minded who I, I, let's talk about it. Yeah. Thank you,

### **Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Chris. I want to pass this question to you too. So, are there things people in the community can be doing to help support economic empowerment from kind of an arts perspective or in the arts.

### **Kris Vagner**

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Yeah, I think the answer is the same in the arts, as, as it is anywhere else you know when you first asked the question I get this wave of despair like no no how are we going to get the government to overhaul everything you know such that there is more fairness.

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I get so discouraged thinking about that but then they think of of groups like Black Wall Street and the script that Nico introduced me to a few years ago Food Not Bombs and groups are saying let's say stop the government, there's something we want to do for our, our fellow community members, we're just going to do it without, there's no system we just, you know person to person we're helping you. I see how would that work in the arts, you know, actually, in the arts, there is.

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There's one particular organization in town, the Sierra arts foundation that did an amazing job. As soon as the pandemic hit, they realized that artists and performers were in this terrible crazy state of emergency like people who make their living as musicians just suddenly had all their income cancelled out of nowhere and Sierra ours, worked hard to get, you know, a few hundred thousand dollars, rounded up and they kept getting donations.

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And that's one group that bill, they've just generally been money right from donors to artists like if an artist needs to pay the rent needs to pay the electricity. So if anyone is of a mind to, you know, contribute directly to something where I don't think there's anything skimmed off the top like I don't think there's much administrative fee or, and there's no hold up like these grants are issued like, you know, within days of being asked for, that's that's like the the one small institutional version of that like person to

person help that I know of. And that's, that's sort of the hub in our world right now for that kind of help.

**Catiline Earley, Ph.D.**

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Thanks, Chris. So it sounds like there's a lot of stuff that needs to happen on a government level, maybe a national level, certainly a state and city level. And that's all kind of big picture stuff, but I'm heartened by the many things going on in our community. And this idea that we can work as a community and within our community to seek economic empowerment. I'm going to have to wrap us up here because we're out of time. I want to thank the Thought on Tap committee including Carlos Mariscal, Daniel Enrique Perez, Meredith Oda, Catherine Fusco, Steven Pasqualina and Bretton Rodriguez.

00:58:23

I want to thank Deborah Modelmog, Lisa McDonald and the College of Liberal Arts as well as Chris Stansell and Richie Bednarski for their support of tonight's event, thanks to our partners laughing planets and I want to thank our fantastic panelists. I want to thank our fantastic panelists. Thank you all so much for contributing your expertise to this topic. And I want to thank our audience, thank you so much for joining us tonight.