

# Thought on Tap October 10, 2019 Transcription

## Confronting Racism

Bretton Rodriguez: [00:06](#) You're listening to Thought on Tap, the monthly podcast about the role of the Humanities in the world today, brought to you by the College of Liberal Arts and the Core Humanities at the University of Nevada, Reno. I'm Carlos Mariscal. I'm Bretton Rodriguez and I am Caitlin Earley and every month we convene a panel of local experts to discuss the issues of the day and have a moderated discussion. This month we are talking about "Future Visions of Confronting Racism" and now here's our moderator Steven Pasqualina

Stephen Pasqualina: [00:33](#) Thank you everybody for coming and welcome to year two of Thought on Tap. [applause] Thank you. Our first actual meeting of the 2019-2020 academic year already took place. It was during the Nevada humanities literary crawl, but this has been our home since we started this series last September. So we're very happy to be back here at Laughing Planet. I'm Steven Pasqualina, a postdoctoral fellow in Core Humanities at UNR and one of the co organizers for this year's installment of Thought on Tap. I'd like to begin by thanking our sponsors, the Core Humanities program, the College of Liberal Arts and of course, Laughing Planet, which is so gracious to provide us a space here at near UNR and excellent food to fuel our discussion. Our theme for this year, we have a theme this year is "uture Visions of..." and then fill in the blank and we have upcoming themes including "Future Visions of the City" in November, "Future Visions of Work and Money" in December. And there's a number of other themes lined up for the spring, which you can see on our poster and on our website. Today's topic is "Future Visions in Racisms" and I'll offer a brief introduction to our topic in a moment and then I'll open the conversation up to our panelists and then invite you all to participate in the conversation. But first let me introduce this illustrious panel- To my, I skipped over a page here- Hold on. Here's my interest, sorry. Technical difficulties. At the far ends on our, on our panel is Jenna Hanchey. Jenna Hanchey is assistant professor and director of graduate studies in the communications studies department. And affiliate faculty of the gender set, gender, race and identity program and the Osman Institute for global studies at UNR. Her research is premise on a politics of decolonization and attends the intersections of rhetoric, African studies and critical development studies. She has a nearly complete book, manuscripts analyzing the colonial

politics of international nonprofit work in Tanzania that should be submitted any day now. Fingers crossed and is then turning her attention to the place of African continental thought within Afrofuturism and how African Afro-futurism can help us imagine and create better worlds. Let's welcome Jenna [applause]. Next to Jenna is Ayana Releford. Ayana is a senior at the university of Nevada, Reno. Currently double majoring in Information Systems and Spanish literature. Arianna is the Director of Diversity and Inclusion for the Associated Students of the University. Even the Nat in Nevada. Ayanna is extremely passionate about making all her peers on campus feel equally represented while ensuring their primary concerns are dealt with while always keeping equity, representation and inclusion in mind. Let's welcome Ayana. Next to Ayana has got Gabby, Gabby Flores-Ortiz. Gabby is a first generation cis-gendered pansexual, Mexican immigrants of indigenous and European racial descent. She currently serves as the assistant director in the center for student engagement at UNR. In her current position, she oversees all of the ASUN recognized clubs and organizations on campus. Her previous position in the center for student engagement was as the coordinator for democratic engagement and special events. Prior to joining the Nevada community, Gabby worked at the center for identity and inclusion at the university of Chicago coordinating diversity and social justice programming and campaigns. She also spent seven years in the Department of Student Diversity and Multicultural Affairs at Loyola University Chicago supporting an advocating for underrepresented students. Gabby receives her Bachelor's Degree in English from the University of Chicago and her Master's degree in Digital Media and Storytelling from Loyola University of Chicago until she joined student affairs. Her work focuses primarily on arts, education, arts, education and youth organizing. That's welcome, Gabby. And immediately to my right is Jose Miguel Pollito Leon, who was born in the city, Ventura, California and raised in a loving intergenerational home in Santa Paula, California. Jose's family instilled in him a great sense of social responsibility to his community. He attended and graduated from the Public School System and Santa Paula, California before earning an Associate's Degree in Liberal Arts from Ventura Community College, a Bachelor's Degree in History from UCLA and a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership and Administration from California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo. He currently serves as the Director of the University's cross-cultural center known as The Center, every student, every story. Jose is politically active and believes in the power of community organizing to create a more socially just society. Welcome Jose. Okay. Now we'll get into a brief intro for our discussion today.

Our session today is part of the University's Resist Hate Event series, which has been taking place over the course of this week. And this is a series that emerged in response to recent events on campus that many of you I'm sure are aware of. All of these events have been detailed by local news outlets, but I'll touch on them just briefly so, kind of provide a context for our discussion. In September, UNR released the findings of its campus climate survey, which collected about 6,400 responses from students, faculty, and staff on campus. The survey found that a disproportionate number of women, people of color and LGBTQ community members feel uncomfortable or unwelcome on campus. More than one quarter of our students reported that they considered leaving the university because they don't feel a sense of belonging here. These results coincided with recent episodes of hate speech that have threatened the safety of our campus community. There were two separate incidents of swastikas found at Wolf Tower, there were unsanctioned flyers on campus for the white supremacist group known as the American Identity Movement, and there were images that circulated on Twitter of the LGBTQ flag being burned. We could also add to this list incidents surrounding a recent visit this week by Charlie Kirk, the president of the conservative organization, Turning Point USA. UNR president, Mark Johnson has promised to investigate a number of these incidents and to identify and persecute the person perpetrators. This past Monday, you and our faculty students and staff responded by circulating an open letter to president Johnson. Jen is one of the co-writers of that letter. This letter expresses concern of the administration's insufficient response to white nationalism on campus, which first gained a local and national prominence in 2017 when a UNR students took part in the so-called Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. And as of this afternoon, that letter has over 1200 signatures. And taking on the question of confronting racism today, we're coming together today to address a present crisis on and around our campus. This is an urgent problem at the local, national and international levels. It's a man's immediate responses of course, but in the spirit of our theme for this year, "A Future Visions of...", I also want us to encourage us to take a wider view with an eye toward the future. The black studies scholar, Frank Willerson, warns that in the United States we tend to think too narrowly about racism as a performance rather than a structure. In other words, our discussions of racism tends to focus on performative acts such as spray painting, swastikas on bathroom stalls or circulating racist images online. This focus on power as a performance too often prevents us from engaging with power as a structure. We too often lose sight of the bigger picture which demands that we examine the factors that the nice certain groups equal

access to institutions, property and justice. A too narrow focus I think on performances rather than structures reduces the task of confronting racism to just rooting out the bad guys so to speak, rather than also coming to terms with the way we ourselves are implicated in racial power structures. To take one example, our University, our very presence in this space today and our conversation today are all predicated on the colonization of land and on the forced relocation of the Pauite, Shoshone and Washoe people. Racism as a performance is terrifying and we're dealing with it right now. Racism has a structure on the other hand, often goes unnoticed and seeps into our everyday lives in ways that may not be apparent on the surface. The structures of racism are usually hidden from plain sight, suddenly embedded in microaggressions or kept as far away in prisons, disproportionately populated by black and Brown bodies. The structures of racism that we inherit and operate within aren't nearly as visible as the performance is of racism. But I think it's important that we are reminded that these structures create environments that value certain lives over others. And our conversation today, I hope that we can keep an eye on the present performances of racism that are confronting us this week and in the past few weeks and months and another eye on the anti-racist future that we hope to create capable of this mantling or at least combating the structures that create a space for these performances. And with that, I want to turn to our panel and I kind of gave our panel a preview of the first question that I'd asked them and they all said this would be quite difficult for them to get into. So I sympathize with the kind of aspects that might be produced by this question. But given the situation that we're in currently here on campus and around campus, I'd like to ask each of you to speak for a little bit about how some of the recent events that I touched on have affected you on any number of levels, be they personal, professional. And I'm wondering, especially if you've worked with students and your capacity at the university that have been dealing with these recent incidents and how you might kind of describe how you've gone about addressing what's been going on in our campus. Maybe we could start with Jose at that question.

Jose Miguel Leon:

[11:54](#)

Hello, everyone. Well, my name is Jose and I direct the Center here at the University. It's the Center- every student, every story but we are the multicultural center for the university. And I think as we're looking towards the future or how he's have to look towards the past. And I'm very, very thankful for my grandparents. And when I say I grew up in an intergenerational household, I had my great grandparents and inside of my home. They were there. That's right. My second breakfast, third lunch,

whatever it had to be. And they guided my, my understanding of the world and what they faced. I was very fortunate, hear their stories coming here, whether they're document-documented or undocumented and the things that they face. So my, my mother and my grandparents and my, and my great grandparents were on a labor camp and they're in a one room little place, you know, they existed in there, but they always mentioned that as the best time because family was together. And I think as I'm thinking about the students the level of care that we have to offer students is that whenever I'm trying to recreate a space, when I'm in a cultural center, we create that space for students, that sense of love. And when I say I was never without love, I'm being honest about that. And not many people have been able to experience that. But I have and I feel a responsibility to share that. And so as we're creating a space for students on campus, like The Center, this, this week, the end of last week has been difficult. The staging area for the Turning Point event was right outside of the center. So you can imagine students just trying to come into the space where they say as the only place on campus they may feel comfortable or safe or one of the few places is now surrounded is in fact, you know, now captured space away from us when typically that's a place where I can escape to but I don't have to code switch where it can truly be yourself. And as an undergraduate myself, that's what the cultural center at my undergraduate institution was. And so we strive for that in The Center. And I think I had to sit down and talk about The Center students about being able to deescalate situations and that these organizations point is a lot of times just to rile up, to instigate, to agitate, to come up to the line and force you to cross it. And therefore you're the one that is now quote in the wrong. And so it was difficult because these students that are with the organization came through The Center. They ripped down flyers. They specifically ripped down flyers that weren't stamped because they knew they could do that because University policy says flyers have to be stamped. So there was a very strategic approach and I was very fortunate that we did training with our students to deal with individuals. They were dealing with mental health crisis, but they decided to deal with these, these students, their colleagues in the same way they deal with someone that was dealing with the mental health crisis. "How are you doing? How can I guide you to counseling services?" Which is not the response that was supposed to be garnered. There were supposed to be an explosive, angry confrontation that could be videotape and then be placed on something like Turning Point's website. When that didn't happen, they wanted to leave when the staff than engaged them and said, "Are you okay? You seem very flustered." That again, put them in a place that they didn't want

to be because their strategy was specifically to agitate. Have you crossed that line and do something that was going to violate their rights as a student. So therefore you could say “You on the left, you folks are in the wrong.” And so those are the things I had to engage with and my staff did. I don't, I'd like to give a huge congratulations to my staff to be able to deal with that because as a Sirector, that's my response. I'm an administrator, I'm paid to deal with those things. I don't think as a coordinator level staff has come here to do programming and build a community for students. They had to think that that's the position that they're going to be on, on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. So they're the ones doing the real work. And I say that completely, honestly. They put an hour still eight, they stayed there, they dealt with students that guided students to counseling services or other researchers on campus. So that's what we were working with.

Gabby Flores-Ortiz

[15:15](#)

Thank you. So, I moved here from the South side of Chicago, which is actually where I grew up. And that was like two years ago. And coming to Nevada wa- I don't want to say it was a culture shock, it was a culture shift. And, and, and the other thing that shifted was I went from working in predominantly multicultural offices, offices of diversity and inclusion to a Center for student engagement, which serves all students. And so, so, and so this week has challenged me on a personal level. It has challenged me on a professional level. I, I had to work with-with the, with the students from, from Turning Point. I had to work with also the students who were leading the protest. I had to work with all the students from, from all sides of the spectrum. Yeah. And, and that's honestly, it has been extremely challenging. And at the same time I feel like I have learned a lot from, from the students at the University of Nevada, Reno. I came from a city where everyone is predominantly liberal and progressive to a state, to a city where I, I literally have no idea what people's political affiliation is or what their thoughts on things are. And every time I think I know what their political affiliation is, I'm wrong. And, and I'm often wrong. Right. And, and, and, and I say that not in necessarily a negative way. I S I am often pleasantly surprised actually. I have met a number of conservative students who, when I talk with them, they spouse very what I consider extremely progressive ideas. And, and that has surprised me and, and it's challenged me and it's made me question sort of the way I go about talking to students from different ideologies. And at the same time, right, seeing student protesters, right? Get agitated by other people trying to get them to respond. Like Jose mentioned, that was really hard to watch. It was hard to watch. And I was, and I have to be honest, I was really proud of the student protesters for not responding

to some of the things that they, they heard some of the things that were said to them were, were pretty awful. And at the same time, you know, and, and I'm, I'm gonna say this, I feel like this is going to be a very unpopular- a very unpopular perspective. And I think two years ago before I moved, I, I, I would not have imagined I would ever say this, but I think it is important to have events like the one that happened on Monday. I think it is important to have those events. We have a number of conservative students on this campus who feel silenced, who feels scared to share that they're conservative because they're scared of being labeled racist. Most of the people who went to the culture war event and I was there and I was present cause I had to work that event. Most of the people who went to that event where community members most of the people who who shared some pretty negative things, most of those people were community members. They were not students. And, and I, I think it's important to, to share that, right? Because oftentimes we are so stuck in, in our narrative, whether we're from the liberal side or the progressive side, whether we're a person of color or we're white, we're so stuck in our narrative that we fail to see people's humanity. We fail to see that the other person has thoughts and feelings and experiences. And so regardless of what spectrum we're on, we tend to invalidate those feelings. We tend to invalidate that perspective. And I'm not, I'm not here to try to try and defend either side, but this is what I see, right? I see students who don't feel like they belong on this campus. I see students of color, underrepresented students, students who have been marginalized, who feel unsafe on this campus. And at the same time, I also see students, right, who have privileged identities, who also don't feel safe to be on this campus. And, and, and, and sort of the question that has been ruminating in my head for the last two or three weeks is when will we see each other's humanity? So, so that's sort of like the place I'm in right now is, is, is I'm still processing, I'm still trying to make sense of, of events like the one that happened on Monday and of ways we can support our students so that our students feel a sense of belonging so that our students feel safe.

Ayanna Releford:

[20:48](#)

Thank you. Hi everyone. My name's Ayanna, the director of diversity and inclusion for ASUN. This is going into my third year in ASUN when and my third year in the department of diversity and inclusion. So clearly it's something that I must really like. I'm originally from Los Angeles, California and then I moved to Las Vegas and I stayed there for a while and I'm currently here. Coming up to this university, My friends and I like to joke that like this school will try you, this school will work your nerves and we'll test you and you will grow. And that's exactly what we all

felt on Monday. I think in my out of my entire college career, that was probably the peak of me having to sit and think of like “What is going on and what am I going to do?” So as myself as a student of color, particularly as a black woman on campus, I never feel safe, especially in this town. Cause I think people like to assume that all universities are very progressive. This school particularly in my opinion and the student body is not maybe the admin and the faculty, Sure. I'd say it's like 60/40 60% progressive, 40% more conservative. But the student body in its totality is more so conservative. And that's definitely something that you see in the classrooms and that you see walking down the halls and my peers who are my close friends, they've come to me not only as a peer, but also as the Director of Diversity and Inclusion and tell me that they never feel safe ever. So this really, I think, tested me from a professional standpoint because there are so many things that I want to do that I think are good but I don't speak for the entire student population just because I am a queer woman because I am a black woman because I am a student, doesn't mean I speak for all clear black women who are students on campus. So around two weeks ago I met with the queer student union and I met with the very first LGBT sorority on campus Gamma Rho Lambda. And they expressed to me how unsafe they felt on this campus, basically saying that they feel as though they're the ones who have to educate people. Why is it, why are the people who feel like they're the ones who are the ones who are oppressed have to educate the oppressors? They always have to be the one to be the bigger person. They always have to be the people to justify their humanity and the students. I think it really peaked on Monday that they were over it. It just seems at times the university does protect the people who are initiating these negative things and the student body, they are craving this kind of political discourse. Because myself as a STEM major, I never had the opportunity in my classes to talk about politics. It's either, okay, let's get to coding class and that's done. But people who were like poli sci majors, criminal justice majors, they talk about this stuff all the time, this fuels their class and like their discourse. So someone like myself, I'm craving to talk about this in a polite and the polite way and like in a debate with my other peers because I want to talk about these things. But I think that the biggest thing we can do is to listen to our students. Because I sit on so many boards and committees out of like 40 people and I'm the one student and they have all these ideas of what they think students want to do, but they never talk to the students. They're majority older white people who don't ever and have never in probably will ever experience what these students are going through. In my very, in the, when I first came to this university and I was 18, it was for orientation and I called my

dad and I was like, "I can't do it. I have to go home" because I'd never been in a place where the white conservative majority was the preferred majority and if it weren't for the amazing clubs and organizations that we have on campus as a support system, I would not be here right now. I would be at a different university. So what we need to do, in my opinion, what I learned through this was to yes, to focus on the negative things and the events on campus, but to put more attention into the things that students are doing. I had no idea that Elizabeth Warren was on campus the exact same time as a Turning Point event because we spent so much time focusing on the negative and not supporting our students who were trying to combat all this negative rhetoric that was coming to our campus. So we need to take the time and faculty to take the time to come to these events that students put on to show that they care about their safety and that the next big conservative right ring pundit who comes to campus won't outweigh a potential presidential candidate. So I think that is something that really what showed me, but what I learned through this experience.

Jenna Hanchey:

[26:17](#)

This experience has me thinking about a lot of things. I want to echo what Gabby said in that we do need to recognize the humanity of all individuals and also simultaneously we need to recognize that safety is differential and that when people are talking about, when our students are talking about feeling unsafe on this campus, some people are talking about being afraid that they are going to be killed. And some people are talking about, somebody might look at me funny if I say something in a classroom. And so while I do want to protect that all students should have the right to say things in the classroom. They should also be willing to recognize that that feeling of discomfort is not the same thing as being afraid for your life. And I think we have a lot of students on this campus who are afraid for their lives. I know we have faculty on this campus who are afraid to go into a classroom knowing that this could be the last day that they do. And that one thing that they say could make somebody mad enough that they might want to kill them for it. And that's what I think is the difference here. I, I don't think this is really about our conservative students and whether or not yeah, I don't think that's what this is about at all. Really what this is about is about people who feel physically unsafe on this campus and that that is a problem we need to deal with. If it makes some students uncomfortable, I think that you need to then sit with that and think of what that means. Because the thing is what, what we're talking about isn't really about conservatism, we're talking about white nationalism. We're talking about racism and we're talking about hatred towards LGBTQ people. If that makes you uncomfortable no

matter what your political orientation, then the question is, are you ascribing just beliefs that support those systems? And I don't think that has anything necessarily to do with voting politics, right? That that's about are you supporting white nationalism or are you not? And people can do that from a various sides. So I think reducing it to like I guess to put it this way, I have two examples of students that I'm thinking of right now. One student who left this campus because he was an African American man who someone joked to him about lynching him during a game and then said that that was just a joke they were playing around. And then also found graffiti on campus that said, all n-words must die or something to that effect, something that threatened death using a racial slur and he left. He went to another school and then I had a student in class that when I showed Hannah Godspeed's Netflix special which I can't remember the Nanette she makes, she's a comedian. She makes some pointed comments about white men. Because she had been subject to sexual violence and physical violence and was talking through the structures of white masculinity that enabled that violence. And I had a student come in, a white male student come in the next class telling me that he had been thinking about it over the weekend and he had been vacillating between questioning why he was so angry and going to come into the class and say things that got him sent to the Dean and that I was lucky he landed on a day when he was questioning. So I felt that a little bit but we talked through it. But I feel like these are the two things that we are dealing here with here. We are dealing with students who are uncomfortable because they feel like someone might kill them. And we are dealing with students who feel uncomfortable because someone is challenging an aspect of their identity and they're asked to think about it and you can think about it and come to conclusions in a way that doesn't leave you feeling like your physical safety is threatened. And so I feel like that that's what this, this week has brought up and I'm afraid actually that it's gonna be reduced to this discourse about do the conservative students feel okay. Because that's, that's not what it's about. We have these structures in place that have made it so that students of color and LGBTQ students feel fundamentally unsafe, are fearing for their lives on this campus and are feeling for their physical safety. I mean that's part of the reason that this that this open letter was written in as circulating because it's really easy to reduce this to "There are good people on all sides. All people need to be listened to. But what that does is reinforce the structures that are already in place, reinforce the structures of whiteness, the structures of colonialism that universities are fundamentally based in. And until we question those structures and start to think about what

it would look like to fundamentally rethink our policies, rethink the way that we do things so that anti-racism is central and you know, being against homophobia of any sort is central that we're going to continue running into these problems in the future.

- Stephen Pasqualina: [31:28](#) You want it to respond to Gabby, right. I just want to say quickly, can you keep it brief just for the sake of time? These are, I want to thank you for your deep and meaningful responses to this question. I think that was really my most important question. So I'm glad to allot more time there, but we want to move on to-
- Gabby Ortiz-Flores: [31:45](#) I agree. I agree. We have to change policy. We have to center anti-racism in our policy. I agree. And what I will say is that there is a lot of research out there that shows that if you exclude someone right from whatever spectrum, from whatever social identity they might have, they become radicalized. And that's what I'm talking about. I'm what I'm seeing is radicalization, right? Students are becoming radicalized because they feel excluded, right? And it's happening for many different social identities. And that's, that's what I'm talking about, right? So when I talk about humanity, when I talk about like connecting with an understanding someone else else's perspective, and when I talk about the longing mats, that's what I'm talking about, right? Is how do we prevent that radicalization?
- Jenna Hanchey: [32:41](#) Yeah. I think that's a great point. And I think to add to that, then how do we prevent that radicalization in a way that doesn't make students of color and faculty of color take on the burden of preventing it? Cause I think that that, that could be one way that what you said got, you know, gets misinterpreted by administration perhaps. You know?
- Stephen Pasqualina: [33:02](#) Thank you all. Hold on to the mic. We need you. We don't have a mic stand. I wanna make sure that we have plenty of time for discussion. So I'm going to skip ahead to a question that I have specifically for Jenna actually that's kind of geared toward your research. So your current research is focused largely on Afrofuturism and indigenous science fiction. And as a humanist myself, I'm interested in hearing you talk about what you see to be the work of the imagination and creating anti-racist futures.
- Jenna Hanchey: [33:32](#) Yes, YES. Okay. I think the imagination is central to creating better futures in so many ways. One of the things that struck me just a couple of weeks ago, I had my students read the Communist Manifesto in class. And when they read the

communist manifesto, the first response from so many of them was, "But it's never worked anywhere. So why are we even reading this?" And, and that I think is our, is often people's first response to things like capitalism to racism, to homophobia is like, "Well, where have we ever seen it not happen?" So I once had a person tell me that because I'm studying racism and that's just a ridiculous thing to do, to spend your career doing because we're never going to get rid of it. So why would you do that? And and so I think that we have a fundamental problem of imagination in our society. That doesn't allow us to imagine what possible futures could be. And that becomes a problem because as a Afrofuturist writer, Coldwell Eshun says there is a subtle oscillation between prediction and control that is engineered in which successful or powerful descriptions of the future have an increasing ability to draw us towards them, to command us, to make them flesh. And so when we reduce our visions of the future to only what we think is possible, we're stuck in the same systems and being commanded to continue to recreate them and even make them worse. We need better descriptions of the future. We need just descriptions of the future and liberatory descriptions of the future in order to start enacting them in ways that make them possible. And so I think Afrofuturism is really important to giving us ways that not, not only center people of color, which is really important, but by doing so substantively changing what the future is and can look like and I say is because when we have those visions, we can make them real, we can work towards them in the present. And so I there's Ebony Elizabeth Thomas has this, this concept that she uses in her book, the Dark Fantastic, called the "Imagination Gap" that we have an imagination gap in society because we have been trained through reading speculative fiction through watching speculative fiction. That fantasy and science fiction is just for white people. And it makes it more difficult for, and, and that, that it's produced for white people too, it's produced in a way that assumes that audience in such that it stunts our ability, it stunts particularly people of color's ability to imagine in ways that center themselves in the future. She cites Chimamanda [inaudible] Ted talk to about this, about how she could only initially write stories. She started writing stories that may mimic the story she'd read. And so we need these productions of visions of the future that are different, that, that destabilize not only who the characters are, but then also Western assumptions, right? Western assumptions, white Western assumptions of futures are all technological based. They're based in advanced technology. And what Afrofuturism does instead is thinks about the natural and the magical as intimately intertwined with the technological breaking us out of these binary ways that we tend to think. And also that the past is

intimately entwined with the future. And that roots are vital to our survival, which is not something you see in most white Western productions, right? This idea of like you go off into space and then that's it. Your culture before it didn't really matter. But that what proceeds us always matters. It always matters and we need to substantively deal with it and talk about it and think about it in order to move into more future-futures that are more liberatory and just and so if you want to talk Afrofuturism let's talk later. But I'm trying to keep it short.

Stephen Pasqualina: [37:41](#)

Thank you, I appreciate that. Okay. I'll just ask one more question before opening it up to the larger group because I'm interested in hearing what you all might want to ask our panel. My question, eh, this is a interest that I have personally in rhetoric or branding of anti-racism. We had a hard time figuring out the title of today's event. So we settled on future visions of confronting racism, but we worked through other options like future visions of anti-racism, future visions of resisting racism, combating racism and again and again with all these different options that we kind of talked about. What came up for me was that this language of confrontation, combating, resisting anti-racism, it's all in the language of conflict. And I wonder what you all think about this. Maybe we could start with Jose with this question. Do you think we ought to embrace critical language for an anti-racist projects or do we have to turn to a more uplifting or affirmative kind of language that might be centered on something like love is sentimental as that sounds?

Jose Miguel Leon: [38:37](#)

I think it's positional. You know, for me as a white appearing person of color, as a cisgendered male, I have to think about that and oftentimes when I'm engaging with students, I have to put that out there when I'm working with them because the way I engaged in face the world isn't going the way that the way they do. My nephew, my brother, if you saw them, you would assume they were Latino or not white, but you see me and the assumption is that I'm white. So when we're using language, it's important in that context that sometimes we have to say it as it is and not complicate it and you know as if we're going to combat something, we're going to do that. But there's other times whenever we're doing something that isn't reactive because a lot of times the work we do in organizing has, does make us stop, pause and reflect and not be reactive and reactionary. That's something I learned from my first mentor, Tim new Baney was Zulu and from South Africa and part of the anti-apartheid movement and he made me do that. I'll say, you're so angry. How do we transform that anger? It's righteous, but how do we transform it? So you can use a term like righteous anger when looking at anger that a student's

facing. But it's that transformative space that we have to enter. And so I think that's where I always think and reflect back on. I was very fortunate to have a mentor and mentors. Janet Brown, she was a white woman. She dated Mario Savio, founder of the free speech movement. She taught me a ton about white folks because I had that anger. Cause when I looked in the mirror, I saw that. I think, you know, my European ancestors, not the indigenous ones, right. In the context of who I was as a person and that led to some self-hate. So I have to think about language in that way, in the context of the individual, in the context of power. I think all of that is important and it's definitely situational on what you're dealing with in which we're trying to attempt to change.

Stephen Pasqualina: [40:22](#)

That's great. I'm actually gonna pass it over to Ayanna.

Ayanna Redford: [40:25](#)

I personally really like confronting racism. Especially compared to combating racism or I guess resisting racism because that makes it seem as though I guess we're more receptive to that when we are really just touching the surface of this issue, especially on this campus so I think confronting racism is a good one because it is a very negative and ugly thing that we need to talk about some that we need to eradicate my experiences on this campus as a black woman have not been positive. They have been very negative, especially as a woman in STEM, a black woman in STEM. And the way that I am spoken to in, in a professional setting is utter racism. So it is something that I have to face some that's very ugly. So I think confronting it and talking about it, 'cause most people on this campus are not ready to have this issue. And what I've noticed, especially a lot of white liberals think that they're very progressive and they don't want to touch, they don't want to poke the beast of racism. But that's something that we have to talk about because there's a lot of microaggressions said that I hear a lot of times on the left that people think, "Oh well, Oh my goodness Ayanna you're so smart, you speak so well." Did you think that I wouldn't? So I think there are a lot of things that people have internally, a lot of implicit biases that are just so interwoven in their heads because a lot of the times when you, a lot, most people here in Reno that I've talked to are raised by racist families and they think that just because they read one book that they're cured of it. It's so deep and intergenerational that it's a lot to unpack. So I think confronting the issue and saying that is, I like that a lot.

Stephen Pasqualina: [42:24](#)

Okay. I think it's about that sound that we turn it over to the audience. So I'd love to hear what questions you might have for our panelists. Yeah. In the back. And let me give you the

microphone. We want to make sure that we get all of this on record.

Audience Member 1: [42:46](#)

Hi. So I just want to ask like, what are some specific ways that we as members of the community or as students can take to ultimately lead to the end of racism or to just make students feel more safe on campus?

Jenna Hanchey: [43:17](#)

Well I think one small things to call things out when you see them, even if it might be uncomfortable and I'm not let anything slide. Cause a lot of the ways that racist structures get built up is by particularly I'm speaking as a white person by white people letting other white people say things and not calling it out because they're uncomfortable. And Ebrahim X Kendi says in his book "How to be an anti-racist" that the opposite of racism is not non-racist right. The opposite of racist is not somebody who just doesn't participate. The opposite of racist is anti-racist. Someone who is actively working to change systems that we can never fully escape. And so one thing is to actively work to be more aware of what you yourself perpetuate. Particularly I'm speaking to white people, but then you know, other people of color also engage in anti-blackness sometimes. And other, you know, other racial microaggressions against other races. And so be aware of those things that you yourself perpetuate and participate in. And then when your friends do it, make sure that you say something and don't let it slide.

Gabby Ortiz-Flores: [44:37](#)

Educate yourself. I mean, you know, at the end of the day, right? You know, I think, I think Jenna brought up a good point and I on brought up a good point earlier that oftentimes the burden of educating other people with privileged identities falls on the people who don't have those identities, right? And so it is so important for all of us, right? To continue to educate ourselves on, on different issues, right. On different social identities, on what it means to have that lived experience without necessarily, you know, asking the one black person in your class, "Tell us about your black experience." Right? "Or tell us about, you know, your experience as an Asian person or as a Latin X person or as a queer person", right? Do your homework. There's YouTube videos, there's articles, there's books, there's all kinds of things that you can utilize to, to, to learn about other people who are different from you. Right? It shouldn't just fall on, on, on, on your friends. Right. Who happened to be black or happen to be queer happened to be Latin X or happened to be APA or you know we have to educate on, on those things and on different issues.

Jose Miguel Leon:

[46:04](#)

I think students are central students have to be at the core of the change. I mentioned my mentor to new Baney earlier and he'd always say, students are the engine of social change and they have to be at the forefront of it. And we support them to be in those places by building up skills and capacity and being able to put them in, put students in that position with also being able to step in when we need to. But as staff and faculty, we have to play secondary roles and allow students to step up and be the voice we may have, may be the ones taking the action to staff and faculty. But we need students to have that space. And oftentimes it's already been mentioned, the only student on a committee, the only student of color on a committee. Those things happen frequently at all institutions that isn't unique to this university. And so we need to stop and pause and bring students in. Students can have a lot of power on campuses. As an undergrad, my cohort of students, and this is generations before me, secured \$3 million to run retention programs, outreach programs in the community of Los Angeles. They're at 37 different sites in the community providing tutoring and linkages to the institution so that when young folks, young students of color saw UCLA, they thought that's my place and those students who are doing the tutoring felt this university is my university. I saw that reflected in the posters this week that said, "UNR is still a racist institution." There was no claiming of it saying, my institution is allowing this. That's a very different framework than that. That institution is doing that and I think that's very reflective of students not feeling a sense of ownership and agency over this place because of manufacturers. You know that we've heard today and others that you can research and easily find when you Google. When I was applying for this job, I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is a laundry list of things that have happened in this community or this campus." And I had to know about them because my job is to be intricately involved in these different scenarios. But yes, students can be in the driver's seat and we often underestimate the power that we have students in. And what I'm hearing when I hear unsafe sometimes is actually I'm disempowered and disenfranchised from the system and I'm, my voice is not leading to action. And some that sometimes that's our fault as administrators, not just stopping and saying, what is that plan? Can you help me co-write a plan to push forward? And we can employ students of color because oftentimes students in color and disenfranchised students come into our campus and some of them are low income. And then we're asking them to do volunteer opportunities or free internships, not realizing economic burden is placing on them. I was one of those students that benefited from fun, from student fee funds to run a program. So I got to go out into my community and provide

tutoring and get paid for it. And it did impact me because it was a job. It was a job doing social justice work. I mean we can do those types of things here at this institution and we're not there yet.

Stephen Pasqualina: [48:42](#)

Thank you so much. I want to do you want to add something to that?

Gabby Ortiz-Flores: [48:46](#)

I just want to add one more thing? So there is an article, speaking of educating yourselves, there is an article out there called speaking truth and acting with integrity. It is a case study on on what happened in Missou a few years ago, right? They dealt with a racial crisis on their campus. And this case study is around, focuses around like what, what our university community can do to, to basically confront that situation, right? To address it to make students feel safe. And one of the things that they talked about was that administrators, right? And I'm talking about not just me, but like higher administrators need to be honest, right? Need to speak with truth, need to speak with vulnerability, need to create spaces on campus where people feel safe to share things, right. Need to be transparent about how, like what, what they're doing right? To address situations, right. Need to need to do those things. Right. And I think it's so important we can talk about dialogue but like structuring that dialogue, right? That is really, really important. And ultimately it, you know, I love that that you shared that like students have so much power because students really do. And at the same time I think that administrators could do well, administrators, faculty, staff, we could all do a much better job of modeling what constructive dialogue looks like for students. And I don't know that we're doing that right now.

Jenna Hanchey: [50:27](#)

I love that point. Sorry, just one quick other thing I was thinking today about how Sarah Ahmed writes about feminist Killjoys and to anti-racist Killjoys and how often the people who as far as administrative structures go, she worked in diversity and inclusion in a University in Britain for a long time. And what she found was that every time she pointed out a problem with racism on a campus, the administrators would respond with, "Oh my God, you're causing the problem with racism on the campus by pointing it out." And so there's something there too about being open and being vulnerable. Like Gabby is saying to saying we have these problems that we really need to deal with. It's really important to do that. Rather than, often what happens is students of color or LGBTQ students get blamed for pointing out problems rather than praised for showing the problems where they exist.

Stephen Pasqualina: [51:20](#)

Great. Thank you. We have a few minutes for some more questions in the back.

Audience Member 2: [51:30](#)

So as an obviously a black cis-gendered mill at this school I have faced like racism issues and different things like that. And like people say like problematic things like, Oh my God, you talk well for a black person or Oh my God, your rich. For a black person like, Oh my, like these things are problematic are when they feel like they can see the N word in front of me and that I feel that's very offensive. So I would ask, I'm asking you what are some tips to approach this situation? Because the way I have been doing it, they feel like they're being attacked. They're like, "I'm white I didn't choose to be, why I'm sorry, like I don't understand this." So how do you get through to someone to understand that this is an issue and that they are being a problem, that what they are saying is problematic.

Ayanna Redford: [52:21](#)

Thank you so much for that. Something definitely that I have learned is that I have tried, you could come with people with the facts, with the studies and if they're not receptive to it, that's really not my problem. If I'm telling someone that what they said was racist and they get offended, I really don't care. Facts are facts period. So I guess something I would recommend is to have a good support group if I did not have my support group. My freshman year, like I said, I would have transferred after my first semester, I joined able women, which is a predominantly black female organization to do community service and if I did not have that strong group of young, smart black women who were so in touch with their careers and were my mentors and who would guide me on these things, I would be honestly pretty lost in college right now. So the biggest thing to do when facing issues like this is to have a good support group. Yeah, just yeah, you could have your friends, but you need a friends who understand your experiences and understand your struggles. Because I have dealt with time upon time, people telling me like the yeah, the things that you just said, everyone's gone through it. Every black person has gone through that and yeah, sometimes I will go toe to toe with them and if they're not receptive to that information, that really is just not my issue. Because if I'm saying, "Hey, like you can't say that I am- I speak well for a black person, you're situating that you'd expect me to speak well for a black person." And if they say, well, "Hey, I just come from a small town, I didn't know", that's not my problem that you didn't know. You're at an institution that promotes progressive ideals, your institution that promotes knowledge and to be, and to educate yourself. So if you didn't know that, that really is not my issue. So you really shouldn't feel bad or feel like you have to do something

different. Just keep telling them that, “Hey, you messed up and if you don't like that, you didn't mess up, it's not my problem.”

Gabby Ortiz-Flores: [54:31](#)

Where are you? Where'd you go find your allies, right? Find the people who you, you're not alone in this, right? Oftentimes we feel alone in this. Find your allies. Find the people who will also speak up with you, who will back you up when you say something. Right. it's so important that it not just come from one person, right. Whether, whether it's you, it has to come from multiple people. So, so that, that is my advice. I agree with what, what Ayana shared about like finding community that is so important for your, your emotional and mental wellbeing, but also find allies.

Stephen Pasqualina: [55:11](#)

I think we have time for about one more question. I think with the red book bag. Yeah.

Audience Member 3: [55:21](#)

Hey, thank you guys. So my question is that time and time again, we witnessed the harm that institutionalized ignorance, especially in education can do in terms of perpetuating systems of racism. Homophobia is, you know, xenophobia. What reforms do you feel are necessary in higher education to combat this institutionalized ignorance, which young people have likely experience for the entirety of K through 12 education?

Jose Miguel Leon: [55:45](#)

No, this is a really big question. If we could keep the answer brief, might be able to fit in. One more question. Our new director and I'm chair of our school of education does a lot of research on the importance and power of seeing individuals like yourself, be your teachers be, you know, if you have black students and having a black teacher, you know, I was very fortunate in my community and I didn't think this was rare to have Latinos as my teachers and Latinos, kindergarten through fifth grade to have a worksheet that was about Benito Juarez and I'm learning to write my ABCs and it's about a revolutionary from Mexico. I didn't think about the power of that. And I know it's not a reform per se, but these are the shifts that made me sense. I'm valuable. Like my, my history is valuable and my community is valuable and whenever I'm going to go to my higher education or high school, I'm taking all of that with me. And I didn't, I didn't think that that was unusual. But whenever I talk to my peers and I got to university and they're from Los Angeles, from, you know, cause I was from a rural area I grew up in, that's why I mentioned it multiple times of my bio. I'm very proud from being from Santa Paula agricultural community number one exporter of lemons. Is that, you know, it's, it showed me that and I was able to take that with me and I

actually felt like I was bringing something to my university, not taking away from it, not the deficiency, not that I didn't have imposter syndrome at moments, but I knew I was bringing all of myself to that place. And that, that's something I think about is we have to do that educational system.

Audience Member 4: [57:27](#)

So I agree that students are the advocates of change. So what is we asked students can we do to not only continue to help educate us as college students but to younger generations to those in high school, middle school because those are when key ideas are set in. So before the ideas are set in stone, what can we do so that they don't create racist or other ideas?

Ayanna Redford: [57:59](#)

As students in college now, I'd say a really big thing is to find your passion and to educate yourself and to, and to be surrounded by people who are also passionate about those things and to like I said, have a goal in that because yeah, you want to educate yourself but on what, and once you do find that and you will be with an organization who will promote these things as far as reaching out to high school students if you do choose to do that, you could con to what we did. And I was the president of Nevada cyber club. We went out to high schools and wood table there to get them involved about cybersecurity and technology and women in STEM and about events coming on campus. And also being in Able women, we would do the same thing. We would table at high schools with their permission of course, and promote values of community service and promote values of sisterhood and having an external family within your college. So, but what I have noticed is that most people in high school who do have these I guess ideals that we won't necessarily deemed to be appropriate for the university almost always changed their opinions when they come to a university because they're away from home, the umbilical cord is cut and they no longer think what mommy and daddy think. So a lot of the times when students come to college and they get involved and they have this upper level of thinking, their entire ideologies changed most of the time. Sometimes clearly like in this campus, I don't. But that's what I would recommend. Thank you.

Stephen Pasqualina: [59:40](#)

I think we need at least two more hours to really have the fullest conversation we could. But we're out of time. So I want to thank our panelists and thank all of you for partaking in a really important conversation.