



“Critical Conversations: Communities in Action”

Presented by Saratoga Educational Equity Network (SEEN), Skidmore’s Black Studies Program, SUNY Empire State College’s Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and MLK Saratoga

January 15, 2022 - 12:00PM

Moderator

Dr. Renata Williams (SSCSD '01)

Panelists

- Kristen Dart (KD), Community Activist
- Tara N. Gaston (TG)
- Fannie Glover (FG), DEI Engager
- Chandler Hickenbottom (CH), Saratoga BLM Leader, Activist & Organizer
- Dr. Anita Jack-Davies (AJD), Deputy Chief Diversity Officer, Skidmore College

Program Description

As part of MLK Saratoga’s Dr. King Celebration Weekend, SEEN and our collaborators at MLK Saratoga, Skidmore College’s Black Studies Program, and SUNY Empire State College’s Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are pleased to present the third in our series of Critical Conversations - *Communities in Action* - as a virtual event on Saturday, January 15th at noon. In this program, community leaders will help us to understand the structural inequities that impact our communities, and how each of us can imagine ourselves as agents for change and action.

Program Organizers on Screen

Hollyday Hammond (HH), Lisa Glazer (LG), Winston Grady-Willis (WGW)

Program Organizers

Lisa Glazer (SEEN), Winston Grady-Willis (Skidmore), Hollyday Hammond (MLK Saratoga), Erin Leary (SEEN), Rebecca Lynch (SEEN), Heather Reynolds (MLK Saratoga and Empire State College)

Note


While some sections of these notes may appear like a transcript, they are notes, not quotes. We chose to use this formatting, however, to reflect the individual experiences, vulnerability, and connection inherent to the panel discussion. No content should be used as direct quotes, but rather ways to recall the discussion and continue to reflect on the ideas raised by the panelists. Our intention is to help readers carve out their own perspectives. That said, these comments are not word-for word, and are edited for clarity.

Welcome

Hollyday Hammond (HH): Good morning, everyone. I am Hollyday Hammond and I am a long-time member of MLK Saratoga, and happy to welcome you all here today. While COVID numbers put us online, the frigid temperatures and impending snow storm make me happy to be inside. We have a number of programs throughout the rest of the weekend – today, tomorrow, and Monday for our Day of Service, and encourage you to look at the program on MLKSaratoga.org, which we're putting into the chat. And with that, I get to throw it to Lisa.

Program

Lisa Glazer (LG): Thanks, Holly. I too am happy to be here and excited for this panel and for the weekend. I am going to just go over some visual things and logistics, and then go through some introductions. We're going to ask that everyone please turn their cameras off, and then for a better viewing experience, you can go down to where the camera is, there will be an arrow. Click on that and go to video settings, and then you can select "hide non-video participants." This will give you the best viewing experience.




We will have the chat going throughout our session today, and hope that will be a place for discussion and reflection. Please remember that this is a space for learning – each of us coming with different experiences. There will be myself and another SEEN representative, Rebecca Lynch, monitoring the chat. And then another of our organizers, Winston-Grady Willis, will be looking through and leading a Q&A at the end, so please feel free to ask questions or follow up questions in the chat. Again, we’re hoping this will be a place for discussion and reflection. Now...

Welcome to the third event of “Critical Conversations.” This is a stand-alone event, but it is also part of a series organized with SEEN, MLK Saratoga, Skidmore’s Black Studies Program, and SUNY Empire State College’s Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Thinking about coming together today – who is co-organizing, and SEEN as the newer of these organizations. When we think about “SEEN” – the Saratoga Educational Equity Network – we usually focus on “educational” and “equity” as the main terms, but today we’re really thinking about the word “network.” None of us are on our own in this work, and we want to draw attention to that here today.

And so this program isn’t just about the network, it’s formed through the network and collaboration. This group of organizers came together last summer. As we were watching the conversation about “critical race theory” across the country and in our community, we were really aware of how little people were understanding “critical race theory,” how it was being used to diminish equity work, and also how even people working in relation to it were distancing themselves. Being in Saratoga, we are part of this network with tremendous community assets, and we have been very happy to work together with MLK Saratoga, with Skidmore Black Studies and with Empire State College, and what we decided was a three-part series. We came together for our [first panel in October](#) – and that was really looking at critical race theory – what it is and what it isn’t – to clear up some of the misconceptions, and then [in November](#) we looked at how the knowledge or concept relates to classrooms in culturally responsive teaching (the “other CRT”), and then today we are thinking about how you go about using that information for the community – reflecting on who you are within a community, and as a person who is aware, engaged and active within the community. And then bringing it together in action. And with that, I’m going to introduce our moderator, Renata Williams.

Renata Williams (RW): Thank you, Lisa. I’m really excited to be here today, and have a lot of enthusiasm about this collaboration and what we will be talking about this session. As Lisa shared, I will serve as your moderator today. At this time, I want to give space to those who are here today to introduce themselves. I’m going to start with just how I see people on my screen, so if you would like to start, Ms. Fannie.

Fannie Glover (FG): Good afternoon, everyone, I am Fannie Glover and I manage DEI efforts for a statewide network on early childhood and childcare, and I came to the DEI space that way, meaning, from my earlier years. I am also excited to be here.



Tara Gaston (TG): I am Tara, I use she/her pronouns, and I am a supervisor for the City of Saratoga Springs, and in my other life, I am an attorney, and a recovering teacher.

Kristen Dart (KD): Hi, I'm Kristen Dart, and I'm a longtime Saratoga Springs resident, most recently active on the Police Reform Task Force, and in my paid life, I get to do some work on abortion and health access.

Anita Jack-Davies (AJD): Thank you for having me. My name is Anita Jack-Davies and I am Deputy Officer for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Skidmore College. I'm relatively new to Saratoga Springs, having previously worked as a DEI officer at Queens College in Canada and as a workplace diversity consultant before that.

Chandler Hickenbottom (CH): My name is Chandler Hickenbottom, and I am a leader, activist, organizer and co-founder of Saratoga Black Lives Matter. I am also the founder of the Saratoga Youth affinity group and mentorship program we are launching this weekend thanks to MLK Saratoga. So, you'll see our event pop up on MLK Saratoga's event page. We actually have a couple of events between the two groups this weekend.

RW: We obviously have a lot of movers and shakers here today, and I want to leave a lot of time for conversation and for them to share their perspectives, and I'm going to jump right in. So I want to actually start with you, Fannie, What are structural inequities that you have seen and/or experienced in our community and how does it affect you in doing the work you do?

FG: Okay, I may not answer this exactly the way you want me to, but I will be responding from my perspective. I recall between 2015-2016, I got involved in a nationwide project for the birth-to-five space. We were supposed to look at a DEI 2-year project. We were instructed to select a project that we could work on for a couple of years. I built a very diverse team of individuals from across the state, who had an interest in the expulsion and suspension of Black and brown children from birth to five – I'd want to pause to give everyone time to think about that – *expulsion and suspension* of children under 5. What we found as we dug into the research was that New York's data mirrored national data. First and foremost, there are only 18% of Black and brown children in our early childhood system; however, there is a 42% expulsion and suspension rate. We discovered Black and brown children were most at risk of being expelled and or suspended, which placed many of them on the preschool-to-prison pipeline track. There is plenty of research available on the "preschool to prison pipeline." Google it. Once we completed our research, we set out to bring this information statewide while gathering feedback about content. I literally drove around the state sharing the team's research. We discovered that there were more babies and toddlers being expelled and suspended than in K-12. There's a lot of research on this topic. [Dr. Walter Gilliam of Yale](#) has a lot of work on this topic online. Eleven years ago, New York State's population was 29 percent BIPOC people, 71 percent white. But the prison



system reflected that 65-85% of inmates were BIPOC. We need to keep our Black and brown children in school and not fast track them to the criminal justice system. I will stop here and yield the floor to others.


RW: Thank you. I think that's really powerful to hear about and start there, that the disparities start at the beginning of life. The expulsion of a baby – we are still trying to teach babies how to think and how their brain works. There's so much there about growth, development, discovery and all good stuff. Do any of our other panelists want to unmute and share?

AJD: I'd like to jump in. I'm new to the Saratoga Springs community, and I have experience in the DEI field, but I'd like to say that we are experiencing what I call the "mad dash" after the George Floyd incident happened. I call it the "mad dash," because there is no regard for what our knowledge or expertise is, it's just checking a box, to have any Black body, so what it ends up feeling like for me is that it feels diminishing or tokenism. And then after we are there, we are not actually brought to give perspective. It is checking a box, and as the work starts, there is a feeling that we are there just to give cover to others. So in my involvement today, I want to be a critical voice in this moment and to give it a name, so we aren't walking around in this moment without naming it.

RW: Anita, I think what you just shared – thank you for that. What you are talking about is so supercharged, and I think what's in there is about belonging. You're naming a challenge we see now which is really that others are calling in, but they haven't prepared this space, to make sure you feel included, or that we've been invited to the table, but people are really asking to hear what you have to say. It's about belonging, and that's really important. I'd love to talk to you about this more because this is something I'm feeling as well.

KD: I can speak a little bit to that experience. On the [Police Reform Task Force](#) – this was a group brought together under the former Governor's guidance and [order](#) to evaluate how BIPOC are treated with respect to law enforcement, and to think about places to make changes. We had a member of the police force – the police chief, actually – who was an active participant during our sessions, who had a voice and was part of the discussions, and we thought he was working with us. And then right as our work was coming to a close, he wrote [a separate report](#) critiquing the work and really diminishing the opportunity to affect change. And then it was posted prominently on the city's task force webpage, and we had no participation in it or further information about it. It was a very stark moment of seeing how power works, and how hard it is to change systemic power.

CH: And you can see that just going off public meetings in general and things I've been privy to. It's not just social, it's racial inequalities as well. You're sitting in meetings, let's take City Council meetings, for example, and you'll see people of color going up and talking, and they get charged with disorderly conduct for just talking about how they feel about something



going on within their city. And then a white person goes up and there can be a little back-and-forth between City Council members, and that's seen as fine and normal. But we see what happens with a black body in a meeting like that. You can just be speaking up about injustices, and now the Mayor of your city is charging you with disorderly conduct, and you're put in a jail cell for 8 hours. The instances I'm speaking of [July 14th and September 7th-9th arrests in Saratoga] didn't just happen to Black activists and protestors, it happened to poor white protestors too. That's a social and a racial inequality.

RW: Chandler, I'm going to stick with you...Actually, Tara, I see you just unmuted.

TG: I want to go back to what Fannie said. I don't need to go into this whole story, but I had the experience with the birth of my second child – mine was a cannonball child – but the hospital decided that because I wasn't able to tell I was in labor, they might need to take away our child – that I was too dumb to keep my child – and so I did keep my child, but I was extremely lucky. Because there are Black and brown children taken away in great numbers, and even though we see it in school, and then are hearing about it in preschool, this is also happening to infants – but even infants before stages of consciousness being taken from families. When we talk about this, we're talking about taking and separating a child from their social and developmental and familial experiences, and that family is in disarray after as well.

RW: Wow. Tara, I'm glad you shared that, and that I saw you unmute, because I think this is really – it's right out of the womb – and it's nice to have so many people and a variety of expertise here to talk through the magnitude of these issues. Going back to you, Chandler. You alluded to this a little bit and talked about some of your other work, and I want to ask you first: Do you consider yourself an activist or advocate, and how or where and what does it mean to be one of those?

CH: Honestly, I consider myself both. You cannot be an activist without being an advocate for something. I advocate for things I believe in, so it's not like I woke up one day and decided to be an activist, or was a kid and was like, "when I grow up I'm going to be an activist." I never envisioned being a part of this. For me, it was just kind of thrown into my lap. And you know, I believe in this so much, and I feel like if not me, who? I have to do this. I stepped up. And I take my activism to all spaces – beyond Saratoga Black Lives Matter. I have begun going out into the workforce, and even in my job, I've decided to be a part of the equity and inclusion committee. And I think it's great and important that they are having that thought. BIPOC and LGBTQIA people need to have their stories told. So even in my work, I bring my activism into it. I also advocate in my work – for my consumers and for myself. Anything I do, I feel like I'm advocating for myself and for people in general. It's not something that I thought I would get into, but I am so happy that I did, because I have learned so much – about my town, local politics – all sorts of things. You name it. I've been traveling and meeting people. Just this summer, I met Emmett Till's cousin, and we talked about our experiences with activism. It was an experience I won't forget. I think about what

we're doing now, and I'm really very excited about the youth affinity groups, and that's activism and advocacy.

RW: Thank you, I love that piece, that you can't do just one – activism and advocacy. Tara, you started to talk about this when you were sharing about your child almost being taken away. Is it different–


TG: —I want to say, I never almost got my child taken away. That's a lot because of this [gestures to white face], and I had a bachelor's degree, and my husband was in the Navy, so there was a lot of privilege there. I didn't almost get my child taken away because I could advocate and had privilege, but others come much closer and others do.

I write in my description "an advocate and attorney", and I think that's what I am. I think that a lot of time what we see is that someone who is an advocate is someone who is just loud. Old white men, some people, push back and say "activist" because you get to be loud or are loud, but I don't think that's..... and I don't face consequences for being loud, and so to me, advocate is someone working for themselves and those around them.

RW: Thank you for that clarification, thank you. For me as well. Recognizing that and recognizing those levels of privilege in experiences, but also as an advocate or activist. Anyone else?

AJD: I want to interject, because I have a few different ideas and a different take. For me, terms such as "ally" and "activist" are problematic; however, what we are doing today, in terms of critically analyzing our practice, is extremely important. The term activist, when it is used to describe someone like me, a Black woman, conjures up images of "the angry Black woman", so the term does not serve me. Everything in our culture already invites us to believe that I am angry and the term "activist" adds fuel to that fire. If I am angry, people stop listening. If I am angry, I am also seen as "hysterical" and "out of control". If I am hysterical and out of control, I will be in no position to make sound or rational decisions, which is why it is so easy to dismiss Black women's voices in professional spaces.

I prefer to use the term "agent of change". Activists who march in the streets and use a megaphone are actually outnumbered by agents of change. We need to focus on the silent majority of change agents who wear business suits, lab coats, and construction hats. We also need to ask ourselves why our adversaries and those who oppose antiracist work never label themselves and why they would never use the term "activist" to describe what they do, even though they are advocates for a particular cause, with a defined political agenda. Instead, they use phrases such as "a concerned group of citizens" and there is a reason for this. As we're thinking about the nature of discourse and the discourse around equity and experience, and the conversation here, I think we need to think about who benefits from these terms




RW: SO MANY beautiful pieces in there. I just happened to open the chat, and I want to read this aloud: “agents of change, I love that !” We need to be mindful of labels that we take on and that are put on us and the work we are doing. I also like to use “atmosphere shifters.”

FG: Anita, I’m telling you, you read my mind. May 25, 2020, maybe a few days before that, I was asked to present to a national audience on DEI issues. To be asked was a big deal for me. A national presentation on DEI? Then May 25 happens - George Floyd, murdered on camera. I was angry and hurt and through all of these emotions, I struggled with trying to stay focused on the presentation. I asked myself, “How could I do this without the anger?” Anger would not relay the message I wanted to deliver. I pulled away from the media and conversations, and I had to think of myself as having an opportunity to be an agent of and for change. I began to imagine a desirable outcome. As I leaned into solution-oriented thinking, I was able to complete the session in a manner that created additional opportunities for uncomfortable conversations. I had to move from the space of anger. We talk about the movement and not the moment – I desired to make sure that I didn't lose that moment. Someone taught Derek it was okay to hate. We must be intentional about how and what we are teaching our children about differences. That was a starting point for me that day, that we need to go beyond the moment. We are all on a journey. We are encouraged to see we are all connected.

KD: Renata, I want to actually – we talked about this opportunity to learn and change. I identify as biracial, but to most people, I present as white. When people call me angry, I think they are trying to put me on the defensive. And I have made it a practice to ask, “Do you want to know why I am angry?” I am a full human being with a full range of emotions. So when someone calls me angry, they are putting me on the defensive, or trying to take my anger and say we aren’t supposed to work through it. Do I have to hide my “angry” and work through that the whole time? For someone else, or to be effective? I am a whole person with a whole range of emotions and I’m not going to dismiss anger because I am a woman. And sometimes, I have righteous anger, which has a cause and sometimes has a solution.

RW: If I’m honest with everyone, I’m getting chills, because this is happening – we have this in common. These are the “get-to moments.” I want to be responsive with time and move us along because we have so many great questions, but there are these “get-to moments.” I’m going to start, Fannie, with you. What mistakes or missteps have you made and how has that affected your work or changed you. That story you just shared, I don’t know if you think it’s a misstep or meant as that-

FG: I come from a family of storytellers, I am a storyteller, and I have been hesitant to share this story for years. When I moved to New York, I moved from a very diverse county in Florida, and I moved to this rural white county in New York where I lived, worked, and was in fellowship. I saw lots of people who didn’t look like me, and most of the time I wasn’t one




of the few, I was “the only.” And it was very hard, and there were challenges, but eventually I settled in, and I consumed the same media as everyone else. And then I was invited to a community where there were more people who looked like me – all of these people who looked like me, and it felt odd. As I interacted with all these people who looked like me, I began to realize, I was very uncomfortable. I didn’t know why, until it dawned on me that I had been exposed to the same slanted media messages as everyone else and that I had internalized those messages. I did a lot of finger-pointing before this experience. Then I came to see that “those” people were also being fed inaccurate information. That was a misstep in my opinion. What it caused me to do was to look at others who haven’t had that a-ha moment, and try to show up as an “engager” in a safe space. That was a big moment for me and that was a misstep.

RW: I didn’t want to jump in next, but wow. Wow. First of all, thank you for that transparency. We forget sometimes about transparency and vulnerability, and to make space for that. Tara?

TG: After my experience with childbirth, I was a founding member of the [Birth Rights Bar Association](#), which is kind of adjacent to but not a part of the reproductive justice movement. I was ready to just charge ahead, hear people’s stories, and then stand next to them as they shared theirs. I was very fortunate to find myself in a mix of people from the BIPOC and Hispanic community, who told me, “Maybe we give them [the people you want to represent] a chance to tell you what they want, before we tell them what they should do.” And that was so important, because especially for me, it is important to sometimes stop and sit down. At the time, I didn’t like that, but it allowed me to become a better advocate, because not everyone wants to have you standing next to them. Some people want their partner standing next to them while they tell the story, or sometimes they want to tell the story to you and not publicly, and then others don’t want to tell the story. Sometimes I still find myself standing where or when I shouldn’t, but I still have people to tell me, “Listen.” I think that is the place of the misstep, remembering to actually sit down and listen, and I think that is something that, particularly, a lot of white “feminists” do.

KD: I want to piggyback off that and say, the assumption that people want to share their stories. There is this idea of speaking for yourself, but the other thing is that sometimes people don’t want to share their stories. That might be reengaging their trauma, and so sometimes the best thing to do is to have someone else tell their story, or give them support in telling their story when they are ready.

AJD: When I really started, I was engaged in community organizing – years ago – and one of the challenges I faced was when there were challenges to my work from Black people, I wasn’t prepared. I could handle it when it was white people because I was prepared and expecting it. But when it was Black people, people from my own space, I didn’t have the tools. I just stepped back, I just stopped. Now I realize that I shouldn’t have stopped or stepped back, but had other people to help me.




RW: We're no longer doing these cookie-cutter solutions, because that doesn't work. So much of the work is getting a pulse on what a community actually needs, which is what makes the work so dynamic. I think all of us can probably tell a story of going full speed ahead and realizing we shouldn't, or that we should pump the breaks. And then there are the times that we realize we should have or could have done more. There are so many beautiful pieces, and also a lot for our audience here. Get in there, make the mistakes. We're not going to get it right all the time. Each of our panelists have identified that. So keep the foot on the gas, but engage your blind spots.

CH: Can I just add to that? Last year, I made one mis-step for sure. Actually, no, two years ago now. COVID, you forget time. Back in 2020, I wanted to start up this affinity group and mentorship, and at that time I was in a different group. I wasn't a founder or anything, so when I wanted to do new things, I had to go to higher-ups. My idea wasn't given a "no," but it was put on the backburner. And instead of saying, "I'm going to do this myself," I let it go. I let a lot of time go by. And now, just now, here, I am just getting this group off the ground. I could have done this myself all along with some great women and femmes by my side. That was one big misstep. I let myself get discouraged, because I wasn't a cofounder or a leader. I didn't think I had the power to do something. Here I am now, and I can do what I want, but I could have done it then. One thing to tell the audience: If you want to do something, just go ahead and do it, or just try. Get your feet wet, because honestly, me trying and starting what I did...it took a long time, maybe starting in June 2021 to get going and talking about it, and here we are now getting things off the ground. Listen to yourself and if you feel like you can do it, do it.

RW: You heard it here, "just do it." We didn't say it like Nike, but "just do it." But if you need the kindling or the fuel to keep going, and look at where you are now, Chandler. Here you are now. I'm going to jump into the next question. I'm so intrigued to hear who is going to jump into this space: How do you leave space in your work for people to be on their own journey - make their mistakes? I like to say that "while our journey is individual, our work is collective." So how and where do you leave space for the people you're working with to evolve and grow?

AJD: I can jump in. I find that as I get older, I'm just doing the work in a different way. I did antiracist work initially thinking that others would join in with me. I got knocked down many times. I am now approaching the work at 60-70 percent, and the rest is space for nonsense. If I come in and think that everyone is on board 100 percent, or that I will do 100 percent, I am setting myself up for failure. For so many years I thought that if people weren't joining, I could do it myself, pay for it myself, but after a while.... And so now I show up at 67 percent - that's my number - to have room for things to not go my way, or for others to contribute or get derailed.

FG: I love following you, Anita, because you say things that spark other things in my head. I'm learning daily to be patient with myself. To Chandler's point, you're going to make




mistakes. Because if you're not, you're not actually doing the work. I'm trying really hard to not include blame, shame, or guilt in my work, and I try not to put that on others. I try to create space for people to make unintentional mistakes, including space for learning. And to do all of that without blaming, shaming or guilt.

CH: What I was going to say, with our group for sure, we leave space for mistakes, or changes, or betterment, because we're all new to this. At the end of the day, we were all kind of thrown into this, and we're just trying to make our community better. In our group, there's two sets of siblings, so we are going to butt heads, and then there's the competition and people want to do well. But within our group, there are 5 of us, and each of us brings something to the table, if it's graphic skills, speaking skills, or writing skills, the list could go on. We leave space to make mistakes because everyone deserves the chance to learn from their mistakes. We treat each other as a family. So when someone makes a mistake, as a family we figure out: How do we build from that mistake? How do we do better next time? We really do work as a team, and I'm lucky to have a team that is a family, for sure.

TG: One of the things that is really important to me and ties to the things others have said before – especially during COVID, lots of people come to me and tell me, “This is a problem.” And I have learned that I need to listen, and then I ask, “What would you like me to do?” Going to what Kristen said, some people don't want me to go to the newspaper, and some people do. The one thing I will say, and I'm going to say it: Y'all need therapy. We all need therapy. Secondary trauma is a real thing, and layered on primary trauma, it can do damage. If there are people who want to be part of the movement but aren't prepared to be on the front lines, we need therapists who are Black people, because a white therapist is not going to give support here. I see a therapist, and when you say, “I'm queer and I don't do religion,” it eliminates a lot of people. And you all and the movement needs therapists who can understand or relate. If people are interested in this work and don't know how they can fit in because they don't want to be on the front lines, that's an area where everyone needs support.

KD: I think, with your question, Renata, what helps me is that you do have to leave space for people to be on their own journey. Advocacy, activism, change - they work together. Going back to the Police Reform Task Force, we were doing our own work in meetings. And then we really found it was so important to join with Saratoga BLM at the end to hold the city accountable. It doesn't mean we're walking hand-in-hand all the time, but to know we are working in this space together and can come together and really push for what we need together. Sometimes slow and through process, and sometimes in the street with bullhorns. It's about what you are physically and emotionally prepared to do, and then being willing to “open up” the work in a way to be more successful – and I don't mean end-goal-successful, but doing the work and progress-successful.



RW: What an excellent way to say it. Everyone has a lane, your lane might not look like my lane. I might be writing letters, and you might be in the street, and you might be in meetings. These are not cookie cutter solutions. Figure out your lane, and then press the gas. The next question I want to engage in with folks: What is invisible or unseen in our community that you can shed light on? Fannie, would you like to start us off?

FG: I would like to pass on that one for now.


CH: I would say there are things still happening in our community that are going unnoticed, with the Free Fridge which is outside the Frederick Allen Elks Lodge on Beekman Street, and then not just that, we can talk about what's happening on Beekman Street itself. If you know Beekman Street, it was a black and diverse community, and now it's an arts district. The Lodge is the last black-owned place there. They are struggling, and we need to keep this open. The Fridge is sitting right outside – created by Alexis Brown, another leader in Saratoga Black Lives Matter – this is important not just to the people who use the lodge or the free fridge, but to people who don't even know the fridge exists or the lodge is on the verge of closing. We need people to start going over there, to get over there if they can, even if it's just buying a drink or putting money into the tip jar, that would be awesome. In addition to the Free Fridge, we're trying to put up coats, gloves, hats, scarves, and food for people experiencing homelessness, for families that are struggling to get good, healthy food.

If people are interested in collaborating with us, or getting in touch with us, this is something that is extremely important, and we really need to not be overlooking the Elks Lodge or even the Free Fridge. I'm going to put it into the chat –our information as well as the free fridge's information. We don't have our 501(c)3 yet, so we are funding all of our own events. Alexis is funding the free fridge on her own as well.

We were supposed to have an event today, and it's just too cold. And for homeless people, we can only imagine how cold they are. Jackets, coats, hand warmers, anything. You can donate directly on our page. We don't have a GoFundMe, but do have Venmo and a Cash app for [Saratoga BLM](#), and also for the [Free Fridge](#). And then we're also planning to host a mutual aid event with the Elks Lodge like we did last year, with half the proceeds going to the Elks Lodge and half going to Saratoga BLM.

RW: Thank you, I don't know if everyone knew what was happening with the Elks. Does anyone else want to shed light? We are going to be wrapping up this portion of the program to move onto the questions from our audience, but final thoughts? I'm going to ask all of you actually about final thoughts.

AJD: For my final thought, I wanted to answer the question [from the chat] about critical race theory. In my work and just in general, I try to think about my audience. For a term like



“critical race theory,” if it’s going to be a block, I try to present information in a way that it can be heard. I also try to ask myself what my audience can take right now. We aren’t going to go day one to day two talking about white privilege. We need to work in time to process, and to think and have experiences so that we can have that conversation. Then the other thing that I ask myself at the end is if the person or group I’m working with, if they can explain it to their grandmother. Because if they can’t explain it to their grandmother, they are not really aware of it or able to use it.

RW: Yes. We need to break things down and make them digestible. I think a lot of people have children. I used to bite things off for my son [mimics biting food and feeding a piece to a child]... Fannie?

FG: Be patient, be patient with yourself. I really believe most people are doing their very best. I believe “we correct in love, and we live in peace,” and I want that to be my final thought. Thank you for having me.


RW: Thank you. Kristen?

KD: It’s hard to follow that statement. Thank you, Fannie. That was beautiful. I think I’m going to go more practical, and say that we should stay focused on what’s happening in our community, and not get lost in the national picture. It’s much easier to affect change in our communities, and that local community change can impact the rest of the way people are working and living and interacting and thinking. Then once that’s in place, you can do what we say, in the business, the work to “scale up.”

TG: It looks like Chandler is writing things in the chat. I’ll give her a chance for that. Anita brought up “critical race theory,” and I know that’s been a scary term, but in the rest of our world, we use CRT. In anything, we look at what the causes were. If there’s a forest fire, we look at the forest fire, and the question is what caused it? Was it a lightning strike, or a gender reveal party, or a particular type of tree? It’s looking at the cause, and sometimes that is systemic racism, and sometimes that’s just what it is. When people are getting upset about CRT, it’s important that we ask people to pause, step back, and look at a 360 degree view of all of the factors or causes, and then step forward from there. You know, as a former English teacher, I always step back to the definitions and little pieces. And that’s what I’d ask people to take on, to look at what’s around them. And thank you so much. By the way, all of you are going to get emails from me, because I want to have coffee. Thank you.

RW: Chandler, final thoughts?

CH: Just first for everyone to stay safe, especially because COVID is very active right now. That is something that is heavy on my mind, and is heavy on a lot of people’s minds right now. I hope everyone is remaining safe. My other thought is to make sure you are getting



out when you can, going to community events, things being held by MLK Saratoga, SEEN, Saratoga BLM, the youth affinity group – going to shamelessly plug that. And then also supporting local businesses, like the Elks Lodge, so thank you MLK Saratoga for sharing that [in the chat], for the Free Fridge, for Saratoga BLM. We ask that you please continue to support us, as we continue to support you and be a voice for the community. Thank you so much for giving us this opportunity.

RW: I think that brings us to the portion where I hand things back over, and I think I hand it over to you, Winston. I want to say, I'm born and raised in Saratoga Springs, and having this conversation and coming back for this – this is a "get-to" moment for me. Winston?

Winston Grady-Willis (WGW): Thank you so much. Thank you so much, everyone. I will just repeat what someone said in the chat. It was really just an honor to sit at your all's feet, and I mean that sincerely. You all gave us so much, and so as we're right up against time, I want to ask, do you have any questions for one another? This is to panelists directly, you just held this space with such integrity.

CH: I echo Tara about wanting to get coffee to pick everyone's brain and ask the questions I didn't get to ask because everyone here is so studied, and I'm so inspired. Goosebumps, and yeah.

RW: I absolutely do have a question. How do you recharge? It's so important, it's critical. You have to refill your cup before you jump back out again.

AJD: I am happy to talk. In being with the panelists, this is a soft place to fall, and it is so lovely. I do something called music therapy, and do it for like 30 minutes each day.

TG: I think I said it before, I'll mention it again. Therapy. I also like to knit, especially little baby things, because they're small and I can see them done. And there's probably some thinking to do about liking working with sharp and pointy things, but no one gets hurt!

FG: Thank all of you and for the invitation. I've learned so much from all of you. This was an amazing panel. To answer your question, Renata, I meditate. Not as much as I should, but I do. And as Anita said - locating a "soft place to land."

KD: I cook a lot. I don't consider myself a creative person in other places, but I cook, and I get to be with people I love through that. Also travel.

CH: Travel, it's usually for activism lately, but even then I make sure to take some time for myself. Or go get my nails done. I love to spend money on my nails, and that's really therapeutic, and just talking to my nail artist. She's my absolute favorite.

