**CMM Fall Fundraiser Transcript**

***“Sharing Our Stories Towards an Inclusive American Narrative,”***

**December 6th, 2020**

**Speakers: Mr. Jean-Luc Pierite,** **President of the North American Indian Center of Boston, Senior Pastor Reverend Dr. Nancy Taylor of Old South Church and Reverend Eugene F. Rivers III, of the Seymour Institute**

**Moderator: Dr. Rodney Petersen, Executive Director of Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries**

Rodney Petersen: My name is Rodney. I’m CMM’s Executive Director. Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries is a wonderful organization. It's the oldest social justice interfaith network in the Boston area. I would like to welcome you on this Sunday evening December 6th, to our Fall virtual fundraiser, “Sharing Our Stories Towards an Inclusive American Narrative.”

Rodney Petersen: Like Antonín Dvořák’’s “New World Symphony” which prefaces this program, this American sound is drawn from native indigenous communities, African American spirituals and a variety of other sources, such as Czech, French, German, Scottish Chinese, etc. We're all part of this new American political and musical composition. So we want to welcome you on this evening in December in finding harmony and acknowledging discord. That's a tough thing to do, but it's part of all of our stories. In this evening, that's the work of indigenous leaders President Jean-Luc of the North American Indian Center of Boston, Senior Pastor Reverend Dr. Nancy Taylor of Old South Church and Reverend Eugene F. Rivers III, of the Seymour Institute, as they share their stories toward an inclusive American narrative.

Each of the three speakers will have seven to ten minutes, then have an opportunity to question one another for about 10 minutes. Then we invite your questions and reflections.

This evening's event will conclude with CMM’s Chair Hubert Williams reading let “America be America Again,” a poem by Langston Hughes.

In Dr. Peterson's absence, perhaps I might raise three points to contextualize our thoughts.

First, Ibram Kendi in “*How to be an Anti-racist*,” notes that the historical place of racism in Western culture came about at a particular point in time. By hearing our stories we can learn to live beyond false hierarchies of human values which racism fosters. By hearing and listening to our stories we can foster a plurality and what it means to be an American.

I'm reminded of Albert Murray and his book, *Omni-Americans,* who saysthere is no American color, but rather a sense of identity which points to the folklore of white supremacy and the folklore of black experience for a global civilization.

Henry Louis Gates in *Stony the Road* draws on implications for reconciliation and reparations, which we might want to pursue.

Each of these topics of history, identity and ethics draws to our theme of sharing our stories toward an inclusive American narrative. Our lead speakers will speak in the order of their ancestors coming to these lands. In this sense, historical presence sets the agenda for who is at the table.

So I welcome Mr. Jean-Luc Pierite, President of the North American Indian Center of Boston.

He will be followed by Reverend Dr. Nancy Taylor, Senior Pastor and CEO of Old South Church Boston and she will be followed by Reverend Eugene Rivers, III, Founder and Director of the Seymour Institute for Black Church and Policy Studies in Boston. Friends, welcome. Thank you.

Jean-Luc Pierite: Thank you. Happy to be here with both Eugene and Nancy talking about the theme of the evening. I do want to open up as our practice at North American Indian Center of Boston. I am calling you from my home which is the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston, and we recognize the greater Boston area. The land which sustains us, the land which holds us, the land which provides for us, this is the traditional indigenous territory of the Massachusetts Nation who continue to this day in part through their lineal descendants, the Massachusetts tribe of the Wampanoag. And when we are acknowledging the land, we are making agreements with our hosts and one such agreements is the rematriation of Land and Natural Resources back to the original people.

Of course, I say rematriation, as opposed to repatriation because for many of our indigenous nations here on this land our societies were matriarchal and so there's completely different contexts, when we come to how native peoples govern themselves on these lands for millennia until we came to this democratic experiment of the United States of America.

So that said, you know, I did want to, because of our theme is about narratives, I did want to focus on sort of like those three sort of different time periods that we always think about: the past, the present, and the future.

And of course, with the with a past just, just to kick off, you know, to tell everybody about the North American Indian Center of Boston. We are a 50-year-old organization. We started after a series of meetings that culminated in the Boston Indian Council in 1969 and then we were formerly incorporated as the Boston Indian Council on October 20, 1970.

In 1976, the bicentennial of America, Governor Dukakis at that time laid forward an Executive Order which described the government-to-government relationships between the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and indigenous nations.

So, serving as the state's liaison between Members were residents who are members of tribes currently within the borders, including the Wampanoag, the Nipmuck, the Massachusetts, that would be the liaison for the state’s Mass Commission on Indian Affairs.

By that executive order the tribes that were outside the current borders and those residents who are members of those tribes that have had historical government relationships with Massachusetts, such as (Several other nations are mentioned; unclear recording**.)** All of those members of tribes would go through Boston Indian Council as sort of the liaison between the two governments that they are representative of and the governments of The Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

And I go, I go through all of that because we are going through this year of 2020 which we came in, we were called to reflect upon the landing of the Mayflower, that 400th anniversary, and we were also called to reflect on like why that landing of that ship was so significant.

As a matter of fact, for North American Indian Center of Boston, what is perhaps like more profound or more important, it's not necessarily what happened 400 years ago this year, but what will happen 400 years ago, April ***next year***, which is the Treaty of Massasoit, which is the treaty between Massasoit and his confederates and the Pilgrims.

And so when we were talking about Confederacies, we're starting to sort of dispel the mythology that what the Pilgrims found when they came here or what the settlers found when they went to Jamestown, or what Christopher Columbus found when he went to the Caribbean was sort of virgin territory inhabited by people that have do not have specifically, like complex society as, as we did.

Right now we are interacting with a revitalized confederacy called the (Unclear recording) National Confederacy, which then expands that universe of tribes and it had government to government relationships with Massachusetts all the way out to theAbenaki that are settled in Quebec, or the Delaware nation that is settled out in (unclear recording). So when we're talking about what happened over the past 400 years we're talking about what happened over the past 500 years. We are, and we're doing so in a way in which we are censoring the voices of indigenous peoples representative of the nations that they come from, and we are doing so in a way which kind of dispelled a lot of mythology that we have grown up with.

You know, right now we are dealing with an education system here within Massachusetts in which our youth are learning about colonialism at a third or fourth grade level. So those youth that are going to public schools at a time when they're able to point to certain countries on a map and then trace with those same fingers the routes of ships going to the New World. Then at that same time, and in the same breath, those students are supposed to, are expected to

describe and tell about the motivation of why people would go from Europe to quote “the New World.”

And then, when those same students get to high school, history doesn't get picked up until 1776 so we are missing at least 150 years of colonialism and transatlantic slave trade. And this is important because those students, black indigenous and students of color, they go through the school system. They graduate and they interact with our public agencies, public agencies here in Massachusetts, that are represented by a seal and motto, which the indigenous community has deemed as racist.

A seal which deals with a compositing of a native figure. So our bodies, our beliefs. We are told that this figure that is on the flag is a figure that looks “Indian enough,” versus who we are as a people. So we are having a situation in which our students are going from public schools into the public arena dealing with courthouses, dealing with State Police and you know there's a certain lack of confidence there.

And then, you know, in the middle of this pandemic, the state does not disaggregate Covid 19 data when it comes to Native Americans. So I just wanted to kind of like bring you know both the past and the present, you know, into the sphere. And then as we look to the future, as you look as we reconcile with the fact that indigenous peoples are on the front lines of climate change. My cousins back home and Louisiana.

(Sorry, sorry, my, my camera crashed, but I'm still on the line.)

So my cousins back home in Louisiana are impacted by rising sea levels and coastal erosion. I just want to like just kind of bring into this talk the consciousness of, you know, why we are why we are bringing these issues here. Why, why it is so important for us to shift the narrative, but then also like bring our own knowledge and work forward so that we can build together as one nation, so I'm sorry I may or may not have been muted. Let me know**.** I can repeat any points.

Rodney Petersen: No, you're fine. Okay, thank you. Thank you, Jean-Luc. Are you finished with your opening remarks?

Then I’ll go to Nancy. Nancy?

Nancy Taylor: First of all, so nice to see a great many familiar faces out there.

Hello, and many thanks to Rodney and CMM for this evening’s conversation and this fundraiser. I did go on online and made a donation, so I'll encourage any of you who are here to consider that. Thank you to my colleagues on the panel for your willingness to engage in this way.

I am thinking of this extraordinary moment in which we find ourselves this nation's original sin of racism laid bare, the ugly underside of the nation on display so that even those who managed to resist seeing it until now really cannot help but see it.

There is hopefully something positive in that I've been invited tonight to share something of my own personal story. So here goes.

I grew up in an upper middle class all white mostly Christian mostly Protestant Christian community. The land on which I played and bicycled as a child and the waters of Long Island Sound and which I swam were suffused with memories of an earlier people displaced, people their presence felt in place names like Manhasset, (unclear list of Indigenous nations), Shinnecock, Montauk. In addition, there is an old really an ancient Cemetery in that community so overgrown when I was a child that it all but disappeared beneath the undergrowth.

As a child I must have passed it a million times, either on my bicycle or in a car. I didn't see it. I never, I never gave it a moment's thought. I now know it is believed to have been from the 1700s.

It is believed that some of the area's last Native Americans are buried there. However, during the Civil War, it became the resting place for African American soldiers killed in battle. Those who served in the Union Army and many more who served in the Union Navy. In New York area more than 4000 African Americans served in various Infantry Regiments in the Civil War. That cemetery today is a memorial to them. The cemetery, now in the possession of Calvary, AME Church in Glen Cove New York has been cleaned up and restored. For its part Calvary, AME Church traces its roots to the 1700s when fugitive slaves began traveling north.

I knew nothing of these stories, of these histories as a child, living while living there -- our home situated on unseated land.

Yet the presence of these ancestors, their spirits and their grief, pervade the land, to this day. An ever-present reminder of the violence and brutality of the white people who moved in took over and left very little room for others.

What I knew, what I was steeped in as a child, as a teenager, was a presumption of whiteness as the norm. There was little, if any, self-reflection on white supremacy or the intent and consequences of the white European invaders. Little if any observation of the pain caused of the willful oppression of those who are crushed and eclipsed, and all but erased by whiteness. I can recall no effort at confession or repentance, let alone acknowledgement. Over time, my world, my worldview and my acquaintances widened and broadened to an appreciation of the splendid diversity among humans. Diversities, moreover, I would argue, of God's design; diversities in which I believe God delights.

I acknowledge and confess that Christianity has been used to oppress the so-called Christianizing and so-called civilizing of conquered peoples. Yet I view those expressions as anathema to God. Indeed, as gross distortions of the Christian gospel of radical love.

I view these as nothing less than brutal rapacious capitalism, relentless acquisitiveness, all thinly and appallingly veiled as Christianity. In my reading of Christianity sacred texts, the celebration of diversity is a theological undertaking and commitment. If Christians believe that God the Ancient of Days, author of the universe is the creator of all of everyone, then all people are good, all are worthy all imbued with honor -- all just a little lower than the angels and none of us, and certainly not by dint of skin color or gender made any closer to the angels than anyone else.

Moreover, if it is our determination to attempt to know, to glimpse this awesome yet elusive God, one means of gaining knowledge of God is by acquaintance with that which God has authored and mothered and that which God loves. This would include those wrapped in different colors of skin than mine. Those whose languages and cultures differ from my own. Those whose plates and circumstances, whose life stories reveal all sorts of conditions. In addition, if, as our sacred texts plainly reveal, if God is moved to action by human suffering, then surely the church that acts in God's name should similarly be moved to actions, efficacious action to alleviate human suffering. And it should go without saying in fact, it needs to be said, however, that the church should at a bare minimum refrain from oppressing and causing suffering.

This knowledge of God in turn requires of me that I not privilege my skin, my story, my language, my country, or my religion as the norm, as the plumb line. To be a Christian is to nurture the practice of humility, recognizing that we will be judged as we ourselves judge, we will be measured as we ourselves measure.

Moreover, Christianity warns of an accounting, a leveling, even a reversal of fortunes, if not in this world then by God in the next. In other words, God is keeping track. My learning and self- reflection around race, supremacy, privilege, diversity, equity, inclusion, such as it is, has come through various sources including books, travel, prayer and acquaintances. Books like *Black Like Me, The New Jim Crow*; authors like Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson Walker, Angelou, Baldwin Coates (?) Kendi. I think of Yvonne DeLorean’s *Custer Died for Your Sins* and *Black Elk Speaks.*

I have learned from authors like Silko. (Unclear recording of list of authors) from books like *A People's History of the United States* and *A History of White People* and genres like liberation theology; black liberation theology; and womanist theology. My journey and learning has been and is informed by colleagues, friends, professors, acquaintances who have opened my eyes both to the rich delights of the diverse stories and peoples of this land and to the crushing disparities of a country bloodied by racism and slavery and sexism, a country conflicted by immigration, a country that somehow manages to celebrate immigration, even as its mother's immigrants.

A final word before ending this section: at Old South Church where I serve, a mostly white church, we are on the journey. Working to become anti-racist or better anti-racist working on diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the life of the Church. Those of us leading the anti-racism work at Old South Church, leaders wrapped in skins of black and brown and white, proclaim this: that the strength, the integrity and the wellbeing of our church depend on the willingness of all of our members to regard issues of race as intimate, personal, tricky, complicated, endemic and inherited. We believe that our God, the one who made from one blood, all the peoples of the earth, Acts 17:26, demands no less of us.

Rodney Petersen: Thank you, Nancy. Eugene, Please.

Eugene F. Rivers III: First, I would like to thank Rodney and Kevin Peterson for inviting me to participate in this conversation.

I am enormously thankful for the presentations, which have preceded me. I'm very impressed with Jean-Luc’s presentation and narrative regarding the circumstances and some of the history of the native populations of this area.

I am thankful for Nan Taylor's sort of description of the challenge of white supremacy. There are a few things. I want to be brief. Which is, I'm black Pentecostal, but having said that, that if a black Pentecostal aspires to be brief, that is indubitable proof of the existence of God. Right. That I could say what I need to say with a certain level of brevity.

What I would like to propose as a challenge is sort of raising the question that Martin Luther King raises towards the end of his ministry in his, his powerful testament: “Where do we go from here?”

Nancy Taylor brilliantly outlines sort of the parameters of the struggle, and I don't need to do a black recitation of what she said. What I do think is enormously important for this to be a conversation of consequence, beyond being a fundraiser, is to engage some of the key questions that confront the faith community broadly defined.

I was actually born in Boston. My father was a student at the Museum School of Fine Arts 100 years ago, and I was born here. Boston was a very tough town. In 1950, our family moved from Boston to Chicago. My father left our family when I was very, very young.

And my mother was a very devout very serious very hard working, black Christian woman whose one of her major challenges was to keep her son alive. I was one of three, the oldest of two younger sisters and we moved from Chicago to Philadelphia and I was raised in the city of former Police Commissioner and Mayor Frank Rizzo.

Many of you are too young to have any idea who Frank Rizzo was. He, by his own admission, would proudly declare, that “I'm so tough that I make look Genghis Khan look like a pacifist.”

It was just a remarkably challenging time so that, and in the context of that, as a black person as a black young person, I engaged the challenge of violent terrorist white supremacy.

What shaped my thinking about this country was in the autumn of 1963.

A month and a half ago after the March on Washington and some of you have either read or you are old enough to remember four innocent black girls in the 16th Street Baptist Church were executed in a terrorist assault upon that black church. That became the lens in the context, through which I perceived because in 63 it was terrorism, there was just white supremacist violent terrorism, which was committed in what was then until then, a totalitarian terrorist society. And so my understanding of the country has been shaped by a more radical interrogation of the facts of the case.

Historically, I love Boston because comparatively speaking, with its challenges Boston is a city with a history of racism and white supremacy, of course. But by the same token, it was from Boston, that the Secret Six who supported John Brown and some Brahmin WASP types, maybe some of the folks on this call, that supported the liberation struggle, imperfect, flawed, but for those who were slaves or the descendants of slaves, it constituted a significant commitment. And so my interest in my journey in terms of a narrative is -- revolves around the question: “Twenty years from now, what will this conversation mean?”

The faith community in the greater Boston area and CMM has been a remarkable institution advocating peace and justice. I began working with the CMM and actually Old South Church when Jim (Crawford ? UNCLEAR) was there because they were the first clergy of any race to support the Boston 10-point coalition, which I cofounded with others to address the issue then of violence on both sides. Police violence, which we recognize it's substantially improved, you know if anyone knows the story. And black on black violence in the inner cities.

And so I think that there is a discussion that is very difficult and complicated. In other words, in conversation, such as this, we all say the right thing. It's all perfectly well intentioned. That's all. It's just the claim of those that are victims and then there are those will say, “Listen, we must atone for our sins. And account for the injustice is that have been committed against the native populations or black people or other people.”

My interest is for what I would call a more adult hard conversation about how we deal with competing claims of justice, how we take the long view and then, and I'll end on this:

How do we realistically assess the current circumstances and situation? We're all perfectly intentioned. We have noble moral aspirations and that's all very good. However, there are very tough difficult, complicated questions associated with competing claims of justice.

And how do we engage those well so we're not simply “well-intentioned people” having sensitive morally inspiring conversations that do not move the needle.

So I wanted to be… I made Jackie put me on my medication, my wife. I said, “I need to medicate, we need to medicate Rivers so he'll behave.”

Because Rivers can be a wild boy at times— some of you know me by reputation, at least. And so I want to push the envelope and say, how do we accomplish this? The Justice discourse is good. Now, that doesn't mean that anything changes.

We just had a very nice sensitive, you know, politically correct conversation which in no substantive way, engages the most difficult challenges. So I want to sort of put that out there. I live and work, as some of you may know, in the black community, in the hood, been working with gangs since 1987.

We developed some very successful models for reducing violence. I, in contrast with the Black Lives Matter, view the police issue as a much more complicated question than talking about in a simple-minded way of defunding police.

Well, it's more complicated than that. The demands of justice and fairness of complicated issues that have to be dealt with in an infinitely more sophisticated way than much of the discourse that amounts to little more than, you know, sentimental rhetoric, that doesn't achieve much aside from sort of feeling good about saying nice things.

Amen.

Rodney Petersen: Amen. You’ve heard the three folks give very important views and perspectives on telling our story. The three speakers. What would you like to ask one another first of all? Really, Gene you've laid down the gauntlet.

Eugene F. Rivers III: What is missing?

I followed two absolutely brilliant presentations. There's nothing you can argue with me there. The conversation structured in such a way that morally everything that was said was, you know, unilaterally incontestable or morally incontestable. So what does a leave us? That's too easy. I kind of discourse. What are the complicated issues where the issue is not one of good versus bad, but one of the perfect versus the possible?

Rodney Petersen: So, 30 years from now, where will we be? Nancy, what do you think?

Nancy Taylor: I'll tell you what I hope and I don't, but I hope that I'm that William Barber of the Poor People's Campaign is correct in identifying this moment as a kind of moment of third reconstruction and that the violent backlashes, that the pain, the, the lack of forward movement is a part of maybe an actual next step of change happening. You know, I'm a Christian. So I don't want to give up on hope. I don't want to give up on people.

I acknowledge that this is very tough. I mean it. You know, I look at South Africa. Apartheid, you know, these are you know where we are, um, there's, there's a lot that would have to change to make things really fair and even. I guess I want to I just want to think that this moment that we're in is a moment where some meaningful change can happen. I don't, you know, I also believe in human sin.

Eugene F. Rivers lll: And God bless you.

Nancy Taylor: So I'm, I'm not always surprised by it, you know, maybe I should be more surprised by it but looking historically, I guess that's my question. And my hope is that we are in a moment. That is nothing less than, than a third reconstruction and that if every single person puts every ounce of effort into it, we can move the ball somewhat on justice and fairness.

Rodney Petersen: Jean-Luc. What do you think? The picture is much more elongated for you.

Jean-Luc Pierite: Yeah. And I just want to, like, I think as far as humanity, there is a call for evolution. Of course we are, for those of us who are able, we are able, by the grace of God we’re able to walk on two legs. But, you know, we need to have this evolutionary step and which we are able to walk on two legs but chew bubble gum at the same time.

And I say that because you know as you acknowledge you know there are elongated conversations, are conversations, which respect 500 years. Of course, we are dealing with issues around the Doctrine of Discovery and how as humanity, not just for indigenous peoples, but like as humanity.

This doling out starting from Christian European princes about who has rights to the land and all the riches and then bestowing you know rights upon people up to the point to where within this current democratic experiment many of our black indigenous and people of color did not gain full access to voting rights until 50 years ago. And we've fought this federal government tooth and nail for the protection of those voting rights. So, you know, we have those very protracted questions and we definitely you know it can point to the root causes of what we are going through today.

And at the same time every day we are absolutely for triage, preoccupied with what does it mean to keep our communities healthy, safe, alive, dealing with issues around, you know, opioid addiction prevention strategies, prevention of violence against our women and then interacting with these governmental interfaces which are, you know, ideally looking after that the health and well-being of all of us.

But in reality, and in that, you know, politically correct world, you know of course that they're there, they're not set up that way. And so we have to come to this realization that there is, you know, a deeper ideological battle that we have to fight. Number one, that our peoples have rights in equity and number two, that the knowledge of our people is that traditional ecological knowledge that ancestral knowledge that needs to be preserved and that needs to be brought forward because we're at a time where that knowledge that you know the ways in which we stewarded this earth, that needs to be brought forward now more than ever.

Eugene F. Rivers III: I think you're absolutely correct. Here again, I sort of want to be the skunk at the party. Because what I want to suggest is that every objective that you articulate is perfectly correct. It's indisputable. Right? it's that's not the issue. The framing. But let me go at this another way.

In 2007,8,9, I worked at MSNBC doing what Al Sharpton currently does. I was the first Al Sharpton on MSNBC back and I remember the Obama stuff. And I remember with Jeremiah Wright, the tape was dropped. With Jeremiah Wright talking and stuff. And I went on MSNBC. I know, Jeremiah, you know, Nancy's one of your folks right? Did you use Jeremiah? Jeremiah got up there and did what Jeremiah does and how we tell about GD American all that. Right. And I said, “ This Obama thing. This with Chris Matthews needs to distance himself, Jeremiah, because it's going to be a headache.” And if the Obama people were as smart as they needed, they needed to put a little daylight between themselves because it was gonna be a problem.

And we had the Obama experience. And I remember the election, you know, and everybody just knew that heaven was coming to earth and with Obama and everybody for, you know, high as a kite. Oh my God. Right.

And it was ALL this utopian, you know, this is it, you know, hope has arrived, you know, the whole business and I remember I said, “Now you folks do not understand the political price tag of electing Obama. You have no idea the blow back you're going to get because you coastal elites are high as a kite, you know, your person has won. We're going into the New Jerusalem.”

Rodney Petersen: The beloved community.

Eugene F. Rivers III: Yes. All of that.

Yeah, there you go. I said, “ Y'all been drinking a lot of happy juice. This is not what's going to happen. I said, number one, and this was a financial. So I said, look, with the election of Obama good liberals have not calculated the political price tag for them. This is an expensive victory. And if you remember what I said, look, number one, race is off the table. You elected a black dude, and the right wing in their reaction says we gave at the office, we gave you Obama. We don't want to hear about black people anymore. And that's exactly what they said. Frontline did a special on this. Right. And my point is I thought that, that advice and everybody said that’s not gonna happen.

In fact, there's going to be a blowback. If he makes one term to the blowback and most people have not calculated the intensity of the visceral white supremacy in this country. They under calculated. They don't understand it. Or they would have been better equipped to deal with your boy Trump, who was brought in on a tsunami of anti-black racism white supremacy.

Now my point is this. If we're going to have the adult conversation about this thing right and see, there was genuine good white liberals who had questions in the back of their mind. But you were a person of racial bad faith if you were to say, “Well, I'm not sure we might want to think about that again.” Well, you know, and the reality is that the progressives, good people on the side of the angels, did not have a sufficient analysis to understand the intensity of the backlash who has brought in that maniac.

Folk were shocked in ’16, right? So my point is that CMM and this part of the country have some of the morally most significant, to me, people in the history of the country. Imperfections and flaws and all. There are some noble moral traditions. They fought against slavery.

There's probably a small minority, they tried to engage the native population. And that's part of the reason I love Boston because of some extraordinary moral traditions that if you study the thing right, are here. Now, my question again is “How do we think this thing through? We mis- understood it, mis-read Obama, you got eight years and then you got a horrific backlash that has not abated.”

So how do we, with the Beloved Community language? with King? How do we think in a more sophisticated way? Last point: you see, Jean-Luc, my read is the more ambitions we have, for you know corrective justice. The game now is not checkers. The political game is a game now three-dimensional speed chess.

We’re playing a different kind of game. We misunderstood when we elected Obama. We didn't understand that there was a backlash waiting for us. We could not even, we could not conceive a Donald Trump. We all know that that was ridiculous. Right. That was a joke. He’s this coarse vulgar tangerine colored guy with terrible hair and just disgusting aesthetically.

So my point is, moving forward, bringing our narratives together. What do we do when we have “let's play checkers” when it's a three-dimensional game of speed-chess?

Rodney Petersen: Before we open this up to everybody, let's see if Jean-Luc? If you want to reply or Nancy, if you have a comment to make. And then we'll open it up to more folks.

Eugene F. lll: I’m eager!

Jean-Luc Pierite: Well, I'm, I'm from New Orleans and I'm remiss for not mentioning that in my own personal introduction and I grew up at a time when the choice for governor in Louisiana came down to Edwin Edwards versus David Duke.

And all throughout the past four years I have absolutely pointed out to everybody that you know how, you know, coming out to hear me speak or like has been an allied advocate for anything that that we have been advocating for on a state level.

This situation is not just going away. It's not going to go away in January. You know, it is going to persist because of the fact that from my own lived experience, despite the fact that David Duke lost in Louisiana, those signs did not come down so you will see a lot more emboldened people within the streets still wearing those red hats, still flying those Trump flags.

And they will be perhaps as dangerous now more than ever because we have come to a point in our history where the electorate is diversifying to the point to where you know reservations in Arizona. You can look at the voting blocs that have gone for Biden. And you can see sort of the intersection between those. And the reservation spaces. Like Native people, actually had, like, you know, a very consequential voting bloc within this last election. Of course, you know, and, by extension, everybody else black indigenous people of color, you know, so we are at a point where, you know, I can perhaps look at those numbers and then say that that element within our society is getting cornered. They are perhaps not all the way in the corner.

We just beat Trump once; he might come back and 2024.

Eugene F. Rivers lll: By 7 Million right or was it 70 million?

Jean-Luc Pierite: 70 million. Yeah, so, so, I mean, we don't have all the way in the corner. I mean, it's still half of the half of the electorate, you know, almost so you know it's not. It wasn't necessarily a landslide.

So we have to kind of, I don't know whether it's a function of further, you know, getting, you know, more diverse peoples to the ballot boxes, getting more people out in the street. So that we can, you know, but there has to be some phase of education in which we bring that other half of the country forward like we have, we do all have to go into the future together.

You know, so we have to get to that point, but we have to kind of recognize that you know where we're at right now is a very dangerous time because of those people that feel cornered that feel marginalized that hasn't felt marginalized for much of their lives.

Rodney Petersen: Nancy, please.

Nancy Taylor: Well, what Jean Luc has just said, I do think there's a there's a glimmer of hope in that that the demographics of the nation are changing.

The color of the nation is changing and I, you know, there's only a matter of time when maybe, you know, people of color will be outnumbering those old white guys in the who are leading this country right now. I guess, I guess I just do want to refer back quickly to William Barber, who you know, identifies that each of these moments of reconstruction, the end of slavery or the civil rights movement have been met with powerful vicious white supremacist backlashes. So absolutely so the analysis is it from that perspective that is painful and vicious and ugly and terrifying as it is, there is a moment of hope because something is giving where something is changing.

Eugene F. Rivers lll: Absolutely.

Rodney Petersen: Well friends I could enter in here as well. But what about you, what's your perspective on what you've heard? You have any particular questions you want to raise?

Eugene F. Rivers III: Smart people I know you CMM types!

Michael Felsen: I've got a question.

So to what extent do we believe that engagement with the 74 million folks who saw fit to vote for Mr. Trump, even after four years of or maybe even especially after four years of what he had done. What do we see as being the prospect of being able to actually communicate and trying to possibly bring the sides together, or are we irreconcilably on opposite ends of the chasm: two countries that should be two countries but can't be two countries?

So what do we do about it? You know I think various groups are exploring what to do about it. And I'm curious. I'm very interested in what the panel thinks about that, about engagement with the seven, with representatives of the 74 million?

Eugene F. Rivers lll: Can I take a shot at that, Mike? I spent a lot of time in what we coastal people call “fly over America.”

Now, I mean, you know, the Deep South among whites, right you know and I and I-- it's precisely for that reason. Like I said, I gotta go understand these people.

Right, because the bicoastal elites are doing Martha's Vineyard or the Aspen Institute or Davos, or Chilmark or you know --what the elites do, right?

There are little watering holes and it was Charles (unclear) who brought me to the Vineyard with Jackie and the kids. I didn't like the black people at Martha's Vineyard. So I stayed in Dorchester but I actually turned out that I really love the place, it’s a very beautiful place. But it's gorgeous place right? But what I learned, Michael, is that the chasm that exists between poor working-class whites who have capitalism killing them. It's killing them right? There is a level of anger and angst that is so extraordinary-- quick point to your answer to your question. I had to give a talk at some college and Southern Ohio Kentucky somewhere around there. Right, so I you know I give a lecture. You'll love this. Right. So I've got my blue blazer on and my sharp shoes and my two-tone French cuff shirt, you know, looking at all good. You know, whatever. And, and I'm going in a town car taking me to the gig.

And I stopped in a 7/11 right? Stopping at an 711 is just how stupid I was. I wanted to pick up a Wall Street Journal and New York Times. So, so I asked the car to pull into the 7/11 and there are these fellas, the guys from like Deliverance types right there. And I walk in and they look at me.

Child thank you Jesus. I almost --Put it this way. I prayed that I could contain myself and everything stopped. They looked at me—it gets better. So I asked have you got a NY Times or Wall Street Journal. Now I should have been had enough. I could understand fool! you're going from bad to worse. As they looked out at that town car, I got it. So I got my coffee. The whole place went silent. I walked out and I thank Jesus did. I got out with my life. My point being that there is a swath of America that we have no comprehension of.

We're elites. We're elites. And we have no comprehension of those people. And so my point is, until unless and until we're willing to hear from that class of people-- not to agree with them or condone but to hear them, the left is going to continue to be where the left is, which is what we are. We're progressives: kind of religious left, more educated. I mean, the whole thing. But until we're willing to hear those people Trump exploited that, he exploited that, he took advantage of brilliantly. You know, and I hope that-- What's her name? Kamala Harris and her team are smart enough to understand that.

Rodney Petersen: I see Arlene has a hand up.

Arlene Bryer, President Temple Aliyah Needham: Thank you. Thank you so much. I don't disagree with you.

Eugene F. Rivers III: Call me Gene.

Arlene Bryer, President Temple Aliyah Needham: Thank you. I don’t disagree with you, but doesn’t that give a pass to Northern liberals, because you know not all Northern liberals or East Coast liberals are at the same place in this struggle, either. So if we just focus on the Southerners or the Trump supporters, you know, it will kind of be you making an assumption that doesn't necessarily exist. Correct?

Eugene F. Rivers III: Well, I'll answer it this way. Every society must have governing elites. See, I'm not against elites. That's why I live in Boston. I'm for elites. You know, that’s why I sent my kids to the colleges I sent them to. So elites is not a pejorative.

I live here,I love elites because you know they read the same papers I read, we got the same taste, they watch PBS right? And Front Line and saying all the stuff I watch. My point is this: intellectually we see with the elites that govern this country because we've lost that class, right? The Brahmins, who built what they built and fought the Civil War and brought this stuff down right. We do not have a lot to say. We do not have among our northeastern corridor or elites, people with the level of sophistication that understood these people, they didn't socialize with them, but at least as a governing class and elites they understood that they must be engaged at one level, we don't have those kind of elites anymore.

And Nancy, you are one of the bastions of elite civility in the world. What's your sense?

Rodney Petersen: You're muted, Nancy. Okay.

Nancy Taylor: You know, back, back to Michael's question. There are members of my family who voted for Donald Trump. And I just, I don't even know what to say. I can't, I can't talk with them about it. I can't overcome it with them. The chasm is pretty deep. And yeah, I don't know.

Eugene F. Rivers III: I'm gonna look into them, but to Michael's question. My point is, Arlene, we have to listen to them. See, this is the this is part of the problem.

They know we are their superiors and we are. I am. I'm gonna say it to the white liberals Y'ALL FEEL BAD saying that. Look “We are”. That's why I live here: we are. I'm smarter than you and I got better taste. I'm not going to drink that pot liquor you call liquor. I'm not doing none of their stuff. I ain't got a fascination with guns because I'm Scotch Irish and I was crazy when I left there. In fact when you do a desegregation of the whole thing. The whites were different. Google white people, then the Scotch Irish who were just gun nuts alcoholics and crazy.

Look, if you do have a degree bachelor at the fancy, you know, kind of sociologists, the one around the Ivy League, you can track that. So there's a reason when Nancy says, “ I can't even have a conversation, I just can't do it.” I'm saying that there has to be a new progressive group of elites, Arlene, that know how to almost diagnostically engage in and provide a political diagnosis of whatever their existential angst is that we do, we simply display blatant contempt for!

Arlene Bryer, President Temple Aliyah Needham: I just want to jump in because I just finished reading *Caste*, (?)which I've gone on this journey. I am educating myself reading this book as a Jew. I have learned something from Caste that blew me out of the water. I understood it to be you know that there is a population of whites and I assume we're talking about this population that Will do anything, not to be at the bottom of that ladder. All right.

And as long as they are above the black man, then they're doing okay. But as soon as a black person passes them, then all hell breaks loose.

If you could speak to that, and your opinion about the elite…

Eugene F. Rivers III: I agree with you. And I want to come back to the Barber thing. I know Bill Barber. I like what he's trying to do. I don't see it going real proper that's another conversation. Let's come back to what you just said, Arlene. You see, Blacks that are elite and privileged see the poor whites have always had inconsolable anger, angst and hatred.

Because what's this when you read any of the best historiography or post reconstruction, the poor whites didn't really hate the poor blacks.They didn’t step on them, stomp them down**.**  The ones that they hated and they murdered were the blacks that were educated at their segregated schools. My family, my grandparents were all black college educated people right? Okay, it's time to go. I mean to Wilkerson’s first book about black migration, because we understood. There was no way that my uncle who went to Columbia in Andover new Theological Seminary from South Carolina was going to go into that 7/11 too many times before it was going to become a problem. So you're absolutely right. Arlene, but and I'm talking about like this community here. We've not conducted, done the inventory to understand the cultural psychology and in some levels, the political pathology of being desperately poor. Listen I cried when I went to do that gig down here in Kentucky.

I passed trailer parks, Nancy and those trailer parks were so desperate they made me cry.

Eugene F. Rivers III: I went to do my gig at some college somewhere and they brought in a lot of the poor white kids. The poor white children who were right out of right out of the WPA. In the 30s, they looked up at me and wanted to be me when they grew up and they made me cry. Let me tell you how deep it is.

I said to myself, if I lived here, I would reject the black upper middle class. I reject them for their class contempt for these white kids who I would stand in solidarity with. Morally I was more and more in common with these poor white kids, they were just marveling at my shoes. And the shirt and a tie. I gave the kid my multicolored handkerchief because he had never seen one of those. No, no, it's a deep thing and I'll end on this.

The faith community is the only game left in this country for (?) Y'all may not know that. But at the end of the day, that’s only game left.

Remainder of Talk is Q&A between participants and guests.